

PANCHAYATI RAJ

IIPA SILVER JUBILEE

Panchayati Raj



Series Editor
T.N. CHATURVEDI

Volume Editor
R.B. JAIN



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
INDRAPRASTHA ESTATE, RING ROAD, NEW DELHI 110002

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Series Editor's Introduction

THE EFFORT towards democratic decentralisation and panchayati raj has a variegated history in our country. Besides historical background, geographical diversities and ideological considerations have also conditioned our approach in this respect. It has been accepted all along in our planning philosophy that there is a need for decentralisation and involvement of the people in the development process. In a way it has been suggested that it is the decentralised approach to development that will enable the more effective and wider participation of the people. When the community development movement was initiated, the emphasis was on both development of the community as well as its involvement in all aspects of development. In order to infuse a new momentum to development at the local level, fresh thinking was called for and panchayati raj came to be accepted as the scheme of things for the future. In a country like ours, while there was by and large agreement as regards the objectives and functions of panchayati raj, there could be no uniformity of approach as regards the institutional arrangements envisaged, due to the wide diversity of conditions. As the community development through the agency of national extension facilitated the acceptance of technological innovations for agricultural development, panchayati raj also created a new awareness amongst the people and initiated the search for alternative approaches to make decentralisation effective and purposeful. Questions began to arise about the new role and relationship between the official machinery and the popularly elected representatives in the field and the nature of power structure at the local levels. Many administrative problems, as those of coordination and mobilisation of resources, also arose.

The process of planned development had also generated problems in the field of socio-economic justice. Some observers of the scene felt that the distribution of developmental benefits, largely to the better off sections of the rural sector, was inhibiting the process of production, growth and development of the rural poor. Despite the homage paid to the concept of democratic decentralisation and panchayati raj, institutions, somehow or the other, in differing degrees in different States, lost their ethos, elan and glamour. It was in the fitness of things that the Committee on Panchayati Raj was set up in 1977 which in its report suggested ways and methods to revitalise the panchayati raj institutions in the changed economic context and keeping in view the requirements of the foreseeable future. Thus from Balwantray Mehta to Asoka Mehta, the

thinking on panchayati raj has certainly crystallised, though the impact on the objective situation may not have been that substantial or lasting.

In the present volume on panchayati raj, Dr. Jain has selected 16 articles from the earlier issues of the IJPA as each of them has some contribution of enduring value to make. The articles cover most of the important conceptual and operational issues of panchayati raj. The administrative challenges that face the approach to democratic decentralisation, the role of political parties, the role of the collector and the personnel administration in panchayati raj, the mechanism of control, supervision and guidance for the effective functioning of the panchayati raj institutions, have all been analysed from different stand points. The role of administration and its relationship with panchayati raj institutions and the organisational issues in rural development as well as the new concept of integrated rural development have also been explored. Views have been expressed as regards the prospects of panchayati raj and as to how the system needs remodelling. Though the problem of financial resources does not specifically feature in all the articles included in this volume, the reflection of the issues in this area does find expression in the analysis by some of the authors. The volume covers practically the entire gamut of thinking about the setting up of the panchayati raj institutions as well as the problems that have emerged and the steps that are called for to cope with those problems. One of the contributors analyses the basic features and recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee Report.

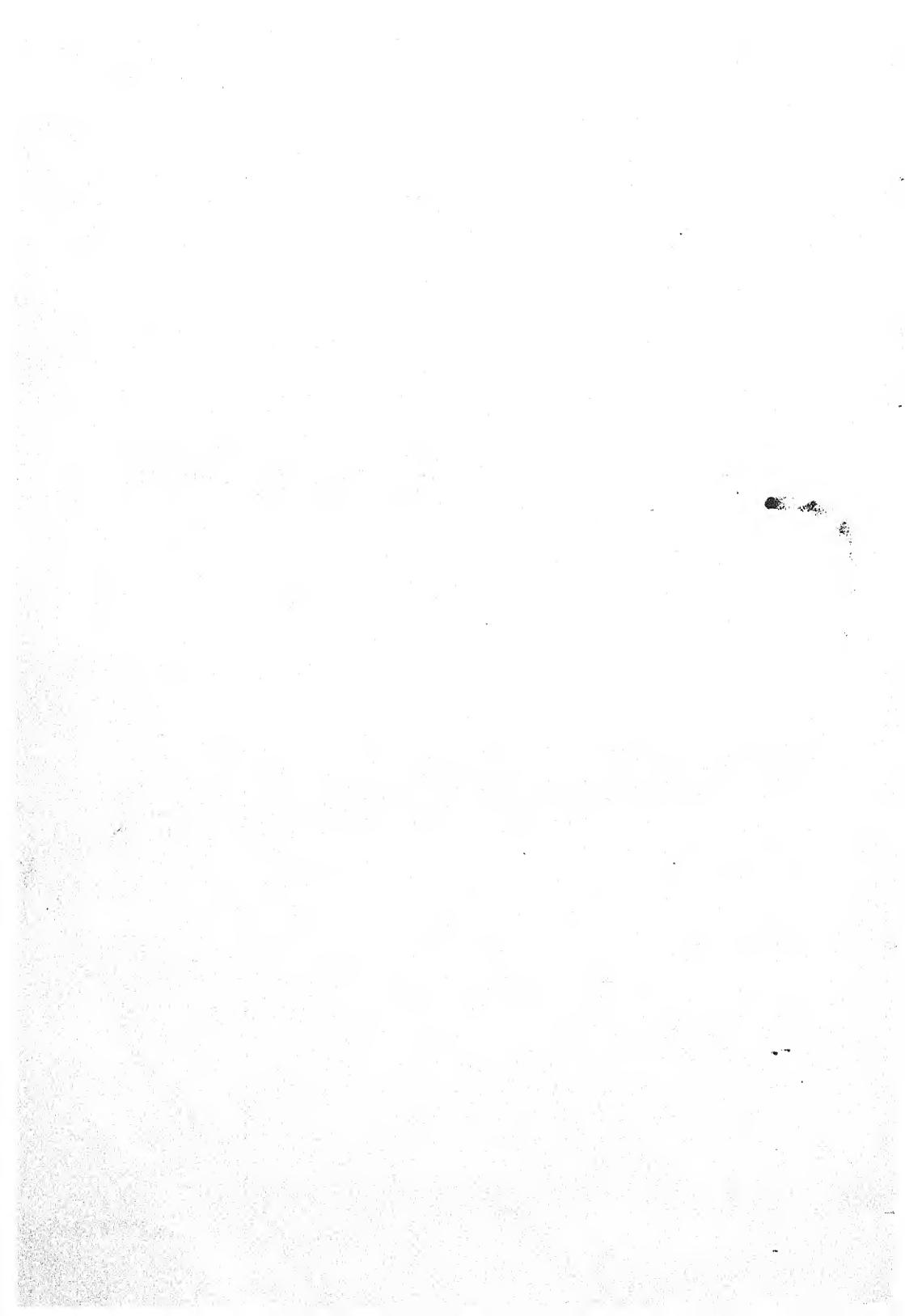
The debate as to whether the panchayati raj institutions are to be seen only as development agencies or as local governments still continues. The issues relating to coordination between the panchayati raj institutions, cooperative agencies and many other banking institutions which are extending their activities to the rural areas need consideration. The question of control and guidance of panchayati raj institutions from higher echelons of government also poses a number of problems. The accelerated tempo of economic activity as also the expectations of the people for equity and distributive justice give rise to a number of vexed problems. The imperatives of local planning at the block or district level highlight other complicated aspects of development through panchayati raj institutions. Even though the limited performance so far has raised confidence in the people which may enable the panchayati raj institutions to acquire a more stable and decisive place for themselves in our planning and administrative set-up, this again requires administrative capability and coordination, effective financial and administrative support, genuine participatory processes, clearer perception of the needs and aspirations of the different segments of the rural people, realistic programmes, etc. There are a host of other issues that need to be discussed in the light of our experience during the last two decades.

I feel that the present volume will provide the necessary base and intellectual stimulus for a more informed debate in working out future policies and approaches towards democratic decentralisation and panchayati raj in the country. It will be of use and interest to research scholars for the purpose of reference as also to students of public administration in the universities and others interested in the subject.

I am thankful to Dr. R. B. Jain for the pains that he has taken in making a selection of the articles and in preparing the introductory paper which gives a thematic unity to the volume dealing with a subject of considerable administrative complexity and social concern.

IIPA, New Delhi

T.N. CHATURVEDI



Volume Editor's Introduction

THE PHILOSOPHY of development that emerged in India after independence emphasised the involvement of the members of the national community into a web of relationships and institutions that would enable them to actively participate in the process of decision-making, affecting their welfare and progress. The move to diffuse power to grassroot bodies was first initiated in 1952 through the programmes of community development projects. Since then the participation of the people in rural development has become the corner stone of panchayati raj system in India which was introduced in 1959 on the recommendation of the Balwantray Mehta Committee. It was not a mere expression of a pious wish but a well thought-out strategy for rural development through mass participation of villagers.

The community development projects which envisaged rural facilities, including hospitals, agricultural extension service, centres for village crafts, cooperative units and many other things under a community project administrator met with only partial success in mobilising people's participation. A search for better structural alternatives led to the establishment of the panchayati raj institutions promoting the democratisation process in both the economic as well as political fields. The whole concept of panchayati raj was evolved on the Gandhian principle in which the village was made the centre of planning and the implementation of developmental activities was to be with the masses. The upper level of administration and political bodies were to draw authority from the base. In a pyramid like power structure, parliament was placed at the top, the base being the village.

The panchayati raj system that succeeded the community development projects, was a three-tier system of rural local government—panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads (with different nomenclatures in different States). The experiment with the community development project, which was mainly a bureaucratic organisation, demonstrated the need for a real decentralisation of political power. The structure of panchayati raj was thus designed so as to enable it to share the responsibilities of the rural development programme in addition to its traditional civic functions. The working of panchayati raj institutions during the last two decades has, however, led to a controversy between two schools of thought, one holding that panchayati raj has not contributed much to rural development. Instead of promoting, it has hindered rural development. The functioning of the institutions has demonstrated that the various functionaries, both political and administrative, were more interested in power politics and

distribution of developmental patronage. Their existence has not only created many fresh tensions in the village communities but has also disturbed the village harmony. The other viewpoint is not that pessimistic about the role and performance of panchayati raj institutions. While recognising the shortcomings in the system, the second viewpoint attributes the failure of panchayati raj to lack of finance, lack of cooperation from the government departments, half-hearted policies, and the defective structure created for the implementation of the development programmes.

Though one may not take up this extreme posture, the performance of these institutions has not been, on balance, very encouraging. No doubt the system has created political awakening among the rural masses. They have begun to assist themselves and have a say in the management of village affairs. Nevertheless, traditions and customs have often largely eclipsed the contractual and secular relations in the village power structure. The villages still depend largely on 'state-help' rather than 'self-help' which has been the basic tenet and philosophy behind the panchayati raj movement in India.

With a view to rejuvenate the panchayati raj system, the then Janata Government in 1977 appointed a committee headed by Shri Asoka Mehta to look into the panchayati raj system as a whole and suggest remedial measures. While recommending a two-tier system, instead of the prevailing three-tier structure, the committee has recommended the setting up of different committees in charge of different projects, involving all members of the panchayat area. The chief executive under the new dispensation is to be a bureaucrat to issue guidelines and preside over the meetings. A local justice committee has also been thought of to effect compromise between disputing parties. To stall migration to cities, various facilities in the villages have also been suggested. As the recommendations of the committee are yet to be implemented, it is anybody's guess as to what extent the new structure would be an improvement over the already existing one, and whether with the change of government, the recommendations would be implemented at all. However, the various problems that have since emerged, viz., structural, behavioural, inter-relationship with State Government, bureaucracy and the people, the availability of necessary developmental skill and the rural politics have occasionally formed the subject for some purposive discussions on the system of panchayati raj as a whole. The essays in this volume highlight some of these issues and examine the problems involved in the process of democratic decentralisation from a variety of viewpoints.

In the first essay Douglas Ensminger analyses the challenge of democratic decentralisation. The initiation of community development programme had called for the discarding of the traditional way of administration—of regulatory mentality and the handing down of orders from above. It exhorted the administrators to give the necessary leadership in self-help programmes

and demanded a new kind of cooperation among all technical agencies which had programming responsibilities in rural areas. It required the creation of conditions by administrators, which would ensure that the community development evolved from a government programme with people's participation to a people's programme with government cooperation. Professor Ensminger emphasises that the principal challenge facing administration is to realise that panchayati raj is a process and that the basic component of the process is the growth of effective and viable institutions. The method of democratic decentralisation is institutional, and the development of the institutions is a process which will have to be encouraged and nurtured by judicial and sensitive administrators all the way. The effectiveness of the administrative structure will be gauged by the manner in which village people develop as responsible and responsive citizens capable of making wise decisions and by the way the various village institutions—panchayats, cooperatives, schools, women's organisations, and youth clubs—respond to the problems before them. To create such a response and to make that response effective is the real challenge of democratic decentralisation, the real task now facing the administrators.

In the second article, Iqbal Narain examines the theoretical implications of the concept of democratic decentralisation and asserts that it is a political concept which aims at widening the area of people's participation, authority and autonomy through dispersion or devolution to people's representative organisations from the top to the lowest levels in the triple dimensions of political decision-making, financial control and administrative management with least interference and control from higher levels. The Balwantray Mehta Report, which provided the blueprint for the panchayati raj system in all the States, and developed the institutional framework in the form of the three-tier scheme, has captured the image of the concept of democratic decentralisation as discussed above. But in real practice the panchayati raj system had not been successful in building up such an image because of many political, financial and social complexities. Despite the weaknesses and shortcomings, the author suggests that there is no need to be pessimistic or panic-stricken or complacent. He argues that the need of the hour is that the Indian political leaders, administrators and the common man and woman, all put together, should have the courage to face facts, own up the weak points of the panchayati raj and make concerted and earnest efforts to remove the defects. Two main directions in which the reforms have been suggested are: the need of political self-control and administrative innovations.

In the next article Shiviah has touched upon the various aspects of the relationship between decentralisation and the panchayati raj. With reference to the institution of local self-government, he suggests that decentralisation has a more complex dimension, political-cum-administrative. Elected functionaries enjoying statutorily defined autonomy have a certain political status. For this autonomy to be real, there should be a corresponding degree

of administrative autonomy. The enmeshing of administrative structures, with their line hierarchies traced to the State capital, has a vital bearing on the functioning of those institutions. Administrative decentralisation would, therefore, be a necessary concomitant of 'democratic' decentralisation. Panchayati raj institutions, having a vital role in rural development, thus become an apparatus of development administration and an expression of democratic decentralisation of a relatively more radical variety.

In his essay 'Organisational Analysis of Panchayati Raj', included in this compendium, S.N. Dubey has pointed out some organisational dilemmas of the panchayati raj system, which according to him seem to arise from the nature of the organisational relationship among the personnel working in the block administration, and the panchayat samiti. Consequently the tension in the panchayati raj institutions arises due to: (i) the multiple system of control over the samiti staff, (ii) supervision of technical staff by generalist and lay administrators, and (iii) the role conflicts among the members of panchayat samitis, and the conflict between the universalistic or bureaucratic and the particularistic orientations of the block personnel and samiti leadership, respectively.

In the next of these selections, Henry Maddick discusses the rationale of control, supervision and guidance of panchayati raj institutions. These are necessary to ensure, first, that panchayati raj units operate in a way that will establish sound traditions and conventions for themselves to achieve a regard for the equity and honesty of decision-making and subsequent action, whether by officials or non-officials and, secondly, to supervise the technical performance in the fulfilment of various programme targets which comprise the national programme. The two main types of control and supervision that he examines are: (i) the basically formal process of inspection and audit, and (ii) the more recent and much more different process of encouragement, education, guidance and supervision. He argues that a strict system of administrative, legal and judicial control could cripple the development of resilient local units. Instead, a system of education and supervision, with occasional control, must be evolved. States have evolved their own methods but the Union Government may have to make proposals for something more satisfactory than most of the present arrangements.

The collector has had varied influence on the working of the panchayati raj institutions in different States. In many States he has the power of control over the staff of the panchayati raj institutions; power to suspend the resolutions of panchayati raj bodies; power to remove office bearers and the power to suspend and dissolve the panchayati raj bodies themselves. In the next article, H.S. Pande argues that despite the statutory supervision and control exercised by the collector over panchayati raj institutions, the problem of mutual adjustments and harmonious relations still remains. To make the massive plan effort a success, no amount of statutory control can provide the harmony that is necessary between the collector as the

representative of the government, on the one hand, and panchayati raj bodies as the representative institution, on the other.

Based on an empirical study in a taluka in Maharashtra, Puranik's essay on 'Administration and Politics in the Context of Panchayati Raj' demonstrates that the relationship between officials and non-officials is really central to all other administrative problems like supervision, control, coordination, administrative improvement, etc. While a cordial relationship between the two functionaries is important for the satisfactory performance of the basic functions of the system, administrative tendencies like too much concern for the rules and regulations, the target oriented mentality of the officials, etc., and the situational factors like the political linkages of the non-official leaders, the political complexion of democratic bodies, etc., impinge upon the legitimate field of the administrator and thus violate the autonomy of the administration. The development character of these democratic bodies has worked towards violating the legitimate or original field of the individual administrator. This has also adversely affected the overall tone of the administration.

In the same context Myron Weiner examines the argument that political parties ought not to participate in elections in village panchayats and comes to the conclusion that the conditions of local government are such that it is virtually inevitable that political parties do enter the local scene on an even more active scale than they have thus far. Indeed, the more relevant question should be what steps can the national and State units of political parties take to improve the performance of their local party units participating in village politics. The issue is not how to get the parties out of the panchayats, but rather how to get the parties to provide good government at the local level.

The next few selections deal with certain aspects of personnel management. While Sharma has presented a case study of the organisation and working of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service selection commission, Pai Panandiker and Kshirsagar have presented an empirical study of the profile of development bureaucracy. They contend that the development bureaucracy in India appears generally younger as compared to traditional bureaucracy, more rural, more representative of the various national groupings, is not dominated by the middle and upper middle classes and is more educated than traditional. But it has inadequate levels of training and their development of professional interests in the more technically based and oriented bureaucracy appears rather low.

The next three essays are concerned with an analysis of the various weaknesses that have crept in in the panchayati raj system in the last two decades and attempt to suggest remedial measures to revitalise these institutions. Singhi's contribution outlines some of the basic pitfalls of the system. These are the elements of distrust between the political leaders at the State level and the bureaucrats, who saw in its (panchayati raj) birth and

anticipated in its ascendancy an irreparable loss of power for themselves; expecting everything from the government rather than instilling the objectives of mass mobilisation and voluntary self-help; exclusion of cities and towns from the operation of panchayati raj; the missing details in the judicial panchayats, the retrograde indirect elections, etc. These are some of the weaknesses because of which the panchayati raj system did not have the kind of success which it should have had. For a better organisation he suggests that the 'executive body' should work as a team in the various organs of the panchayati raj—the panchayat, panchayat samitis, and zila parishads, and the electoral college for these bodies should consist of all eligible citizen voters.

Similarly R.N. Halidpur argues that the main ills of the panchayati raj system arise out of superimposing the modern concepts of democracy, socialism and secularism on a traditional society which is based on caste, creed any religion. For the modernising forces to enter the very heart of the rural community, people should be sensitised to social responsibility and awakened to broader national requirements. The assumption in the panchayati raj system that the village is and could be a self-sufficient homogenous unit is basically wrong. There is a need to activise the gram sabha and to broaden the base of the gram panchayat so that the forces of interaction could bring the villagers together in a wider community with better viability. The panchayat should be located at the existing or potential growth-centres, covering a group of villages which could serve as wards and act as their hinterland. The next tier—the panchayat union council or what is known as the panchayat samitis—could consist of representatives of various gram panchayats by indirect election so that they would be responsible and accountable to the panchayats and indirectly to the village people. The unit of planning, however, should be the district with the zila parishad consisting of a majority of members elected by direct election, and the rest from the panchayat samitis. So remodelled, the panchayati raj bodies, argues Halidpur, would be able to create, amongst the rural population, national impulses through a perception of national goals and reconcile them with local aspirations.

Similarly P.C. Mathur argues that the restructuring of panchayati raj system should begin from below with a view to making the village panchayat an operational unit for popular representation as well as planned development. While the area of a panchayat should be recarved on a more viable basis, the number of members of such panchayats should be fixed on an all-India basis at five, which would link them meaningfully with historical and social traditions. Activisation of gram sabhas; consideration of the inter-institutional linkages, with special reference to the powers of control and supervision of one panchayati raj institution over the other panchayati raj institutions; increasing the technical efficiency of the panchayati raj institutions through resource mobilisation; the inculcation

Democratic Decentralisation : A New Administrative Challenge*

Douglas Ensminger

DURING THE fourteen years of India's independence one of the most important processes that has occurred has been the incorporation of change as a significant part of the country's way of life. When India was on the eve of the First Five Year Plan, there was considerable uncertainty about the ability of the governmental administrative structure to meet the challenge before it, the challenge of putting aside its colonial functions of legal regulation and revenue collection and to assume the responsibilities of developmental administration which were essential for the achievement of the targets of the Plan. There was also uncertainty about the extent to which participation of the people could be expected in government initiated and directed development programmes.

Now that some five year plans have been completed, it is appropriate to back off, take stock, and try to assess whether or not such fears have had basis in fact. It is true, of course, that one can and should express the view that more could have been accomplished in all fields of development. But even so, the record is clear that India has chalked up a remarkable record of achievement in the last decade, a record which stands in great contrast to all other new developing countries.

Much of the credit for these successes must go to the contribution of administrators to the development effort. Not that such a contribution comes as a surprise. To the contrary, one of India's prime assets at the beginning of its development journey was an established administrative bureaucracy, with key positions manned by the highly trained cadre of the Indian Civil Service. And these men, though they had served under British rule, were of such high quality as men and as administrators to respond to the challenge which was put before them.

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VII, 1961, No 2, pp. 287-96.

MUTUAL RESPECT BETWEEN POLITICAL LEADERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

It would, however, be a mistake to attribute the achievements of the last fourteen years to the work of administrators alone. There are in fact two elements: the political leaders and the administrators. In the first instance the political leaders have created forward-looking policies for the nation, and in the second, the administrative bureaucracy has taken up the challenge of formulating the specific programmes to execute the politically formulated policies.

This two-fold cooperation is of utmost importance, and it is paramount that the roles of political leaders and administrators in the development process continue to be carefully thought out. The function of political leaders is, and must continue to be, to express the revolutionary ideas, which, as they become accepted, are the basis of policy and, later, of programmes. The administrative bureaucracy, on the other hand, has as its function the clarification of policy and the formulation of administrative policies and procedures capable of executive desired programmes. For such a process to work, there must be mutual respect between the political leaders who express the policies and the administrative staff who execute them. Without such respect, the intricate interworking is bound to have difficulties.

India has been fortunate in having both political leaders and administrators of intelligence and vision who have made this inter-relationship a successful one. Its principal political leader thought deeply, during the struggle for independence, about the new India which he wished to see emerge. Thus the broad structural design for the new nation was formulated even before independence, thereby giving its concrete embodiment in the various five year plans a sense of direction within a firm cultural setting. This has meant that all of India's planning has been designed in the first instance to facilitate the development of a significant Indian culture and in the second to assure that economic and social developments were oriented in such a way that they would bring maximum benefit to all.

That all of this has been so has certainly been a significant factor in helping the administrative bureaucracy to successfully execute national development programmes. The political leaders put before the administrators two definite points : the starting point and a well-formulated set of new goals. The big task before the administrators was to design steps by which the country could move from the starting line to the places to which the political leaders had indicated the new programmes should take the country.

DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION

Development, however, is by definition a set of continuing challenges, and while congratulating both political leaders and administrators on the successes obtained thus far, it is even more important that we look to the

new challenges now facing the development efforts. It is in this light that I wish to look at democratic decentralisation and the challenge it presents, principally to the administrators but to political leaders as well.

It would be faulty analysis if we tried to view the challenge of democratic decentralisation *in vacuo*. The new programme is closely and vitally related to community development, and for us to understand the basis of the present challenge to administration, we must first trace the administrative evolution that has occurred over the last ten years, during the working of the community development programme.

Community development was not a new idea at independence. First Tagore and later Gandhi experimented with rural development programmes and expressed the urgent need for national attention to improving the lot of the forgotten men, women, and children who live in India's 558,000 villages. Thus it was neither a surprise nor an accident that the First Five Year Plan gave high priority to a national programme for the development of all phases of village life.

The principal objective of community development is to bring about social and economic advancement through the creation of new psychological attitudes. In essence it is a psychological process intended to wean the village people from their reliance on the traditions of the past and to create in them a full acceptance of science and technology in their ways both of living and making a living.

A process so subtle and intricate as this demands a dynamism and willingness to change from the administrative structure responsible for its execution. Indeed, in one sense, the success or lack of it in community development has been, and will continue to be related to the capacity of the administrative bureaucracy to change itself in the face of new demands and thereby give leadership to the development of a process initiated by the ideas of the political leaders.

We thus see that the initiation of community development as a national programme confronted the administrative bureaucracy with one of the greatest challenges it will ever have to face. The new programme called for the discarding of traditional ways of administration—of regulatory mentality and the handing down of orders from above. It sought administrators who had faith in the capacity of village people to give the necessary leadership in self-help programmes. It demanded a new kind of cooperation among all technical agencies which had programming responsibilities in rural areas. It required the creation of conditions, by administrators, which would assure that community development evolved from a Government programme with people's participation to a people's programme with government cooperation.

INADEQUATE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

At this point, it is important that we ask ourselves to what degree has

this challenge been met? To what degree has the administrative bureaucracy evolved to meet the new demands of the community development programme?

In many ways it is evident that this evolution has fallen short of expectations and has not shown the flexibility that the programme requires. The very emphasis on democratic decentralisation indicates the need for further steps, and new governmental structures, to introduce greater popular participation in community development. It was this point that the Balvantry Mehta report stressed and it is this feeling which has motivated the new legislation for panchayati raj.

But at the same time, we must not make the mistake of emphasising the shortcomings of the administrative structure to the point of not seeing how great an evolution it actually has made. In fact, it seems that far too little credit has been given to the administrators for their changes in attitude and adaptation to new demands. In many ways, the administrative bureaucracy has met the challenge before it, and it is within this context that we must view the new challenge of democratic decentralisation.

Let me give several concrete examples. The bureaucracy has succeeded in organising 3,500 community development blocks and has trained some 60,000 workers for all phases of community development work. Furthermore, after ten years of experience with community development, there has emerged a vast body of experience in the use of extension education methods and within the administrative structure there are large numbers of men who are today champions of a programme which places primary responsibility in the hands of the people. And anyone who has worked with the programme for its entire ten-year life-time cannot help but be impressed with the way in which administrators at all levels have become more responsive to new ideas coming up to them both from the lower levels of the administrative structure itself and from the people touched by the programme.

Thus we need not fear that democratic decentralisation is confronting the administrative bureaucracy with a challenge utterly new to it. To the contrary, it is another logical step, different in degree rather than kind, in the continuous process of evolution that has been taking place with increasing momentum over the last ten years. The administrators have been adequately prepared for the new challenge of democratic decentralisation, and it seems to me that any apprehension about their ability to face it effectively is unfounded.

In fact, I am convinced that the challenge of democratic decentralisation is as much, if not more so, a challenge to the political leaders as it is to the administrators. The greatest single need, at this time, is for clarity of policy and for foresight in formulating legislation which will make it possible for the administrative bureaucracy to have a clearly defined role in the execution of the Programme. It is, after all, the legislation which sets the limits within which the administrator can function, and there is a danger that if these

limits are not clearly and properly demarcated, the programme as a whole will suffer.

I do not, of course, emphasise legislation because I think it alone will not do the job. As a sociologist, I am convinced that the development of motivations and institutions is not a process which can be legislated. But at the same time, I am equally convinced that without the proper legislation the process which community development hopes to initiate will not take place. It is the legislation which *enables* the administrators to evolve a programme which will be effective and successful.

In this respect, the most important thing facing the makers of legislation is the need for the proper balance. Democratic decentralisation is intended to be a people's programme, and the legislation must build in assurances that they will be the masters of their own destiny. But at the same time, it must guard against giving the village people so many powers that they will also become masters of the servants of government. The legislation must assure the village people of their right and duty to give leadership in the formulation of village, block, and district programmes and to come to the fore in suggesting the things which they themselves can do to solve their own problems. Yet it must not deprive the administrative bureaucracy of its carefully defined and important function in the development effort. The pendulum must not swing so far that the government servants lose their proper function as qualified technical and general administrators who can help the people analyze their problems and think through alternate solutions. Thus the legislation will have defeated its own overall purpose if the gram sevak loses his multi-purpose extension role and becomes, as he is beginning to in certain areas, no more than a combination assistant, errand boy, and peon for the sarpanch. Similarly, the block development officer must remain the leader of team of extension specialists and must have carefully enough defined powers to be able to initiate and carry out suggestions of his own, lest he too becomes no more than a subordinate of the samiti president.

Another requirement of the legislation is the assurance that the villagers create their own working groups and exert a maximum of effort before they can be considered eligible for government grants. The legislation must make clear that panchayati raj is not merely a new way of distributing the spoils of community development funds. If this is not guarded against, the people will develop attitudes and habits which will place primary emphasis on a sarpanch who is able to get more than an adequate slice of the pie block development funds. This, of course, would be a disastrous failure, since under democratic decentralisation community development must continue to be an ever-increasing process of education, and in this process, the new institutions must play a leading role.

Finally, the legislation must assure that basic village institutions—panchayats, cooperatives, and schools—can develop as truly viable people's institutions. Then, when this has been accomplished, both the political

leaders and the administrators must, through educational and extension methods, convince the people of the full potential of these institutions when they have been given the full support of the people. They must demonstrate convincingly to the people that panchayati raj is an institutional programme and that through the new institutions, the people themselves can effectively overcome their own problems.

There is one final, and paramount, role which the political leaders can play in meeting the challenge of democratic decentralisation. This again is a question of the proper balance and one which must be tackled not merely through legislation but through the tone set by the political leaders as well. It is, as I have said above, important to emphasise the role of the people and their institutions in community development under panchayati raj. At the same time, however, it must be emphasised again and again that the village people themselves are only a part of the overall programme. Just as the officials alone have not, and will not be able to, attain the goals of community development, so also the village people by themselves will not be able to succeed. The problem at hand requires joint effort and only through joint effort can it be solved. It would be unthinkable, for instance, to assume that such pressing national and local problems as food production, employment, environmental sanitation, housing, and family planning can be solved by either the people or the government working independently of one another. Such problems can be solved only when the people provide the leadership and are sufficiently organised within their institutions to take advantage of the technical guidance which can be provided on a systematic basis only through the government.

CHANGE IN ADMINISTRATIVE ORIENTATION

If these, then, are the challenges to the political leaders, what are the challenges to the administrators? In what ways do they have to change, their ways of thinking and acting if the new panchayati raj ideas are to be successfully implemented?

First and foremost among these challenges is the realisation that within democratic decentralisation the administrators must move completely away from the tendency to pass down orders. As I said above, the past ten years have been a time of impressive evolution from this way of thinking; but the time has come for an even more complete break. The administrative bureaucracy can no longer expect to pass down orders from level to level for the formation of programme objectives and the development of plans to achieve these objectives.

With democratic decentralisation the administrative orientation must shift quite completely from making decisions and issuing orders to helping the people make decisions through their panchayats, cooperatives, and samitis. What is needed is what I have elsewhere called the "principle of assistance". Instead of telling panchayats what to do, the administrators

and technical staff will have to assist them in drawing up plans of works, assist them in deciding how decisions are to be implemented, and in determining who is to do what, when, how, and with what help from whom.

In facing this problem, the administrators and technical specialists should remember that they themselves are a resource, and that this technical resource is just as important as the physical and financial resources which they can provide to the villagers. To combine this resource with physical resources and popular initiative in a way that insures maximum effectiveness from the combination is a principal challenge for the administrator.

Another challenge which will face the administrative bureaucracy is the kind of target which it sets for itself. In the future, the effectiveness of the administration must be judged by the extent to which village people accept their responsibilities in developing and maintaining effective village institutions and the way in which the government officials assist these institutions in solving village problems. Yardsticks based on physical targets—schools built, roads constructed, wells dug—will no longer be sufficient. Nor will it be sufficient to judge by what the staff has persuaded the villagers to do. It is the principle of assistance by which it must be judged—what has the staff done to assist the village institutions in formulating and implementing their programmes?

This relates to another challenge facing the administrators—the realisation that the significant processes of decision will now be channelled through village institutions and not through individual villagers. The administrators must learn to deal primarily with these bodies as the loci of decision-making and through them, with the village people themselves. This, of course, will involve an entirely new administrative approach, aimed at involving these institutions significantly and effectively in the decision-making process.

This cannot be too strongly emphasised. Indeed, perhaps the principal challenge facing administration is to realise that panchayati raj is a process and that the basic component of the process is the growth of effective and viable institutions. The method of democratic decentralisation is an institutional one, and the development of these institutions is a process which will have to be encouraged and nurtured by judicious and sensitive administrators at every bend of the way. These new institutions face numerous situations with which they have never before been confronted, and without the aid of the administrators, their process of growth is sure to be uncertain and perhaps even unsuccessful.

EMERGING ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATION

If these, then, are the challenges, what must be the response? What must be done, both by the individual administrator and by the makers of the system, to help the administrative bureaucracy successfully confront the new set of challenges before them?

On the individual level, the challenges calls for vision, tolerance, and ability. The administrator must be willing, and able, to recognise the subtle sociological and psychological problems created by the attempt to nourish a process, and he must have both the foresight and the fortitude not to become discouraged if this process seems to develop more slowly than he, as an administrator, would like.

But it would be too much of us to expect the individual administrator, trained and conditioned by his system, to respond on his own, without concomitant changes in the system itself. Indeed, without certain changes in the overall system of training and placing administrators, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the challenge to be met.

First, and perhaps foremost, the administrative bureaucracy must accept the full implication of an orientation towards a dynamic process of growth and realise that only an administrator who is emotionally involved with his work will be able to nourish successfully the new panchayati raj institutions. But if a man is moved from position to position every three years, what is the likelihood of his developing such an involvement? Very slight, it seems to me, and as a result, I am convinced that one of the most important steps to be taken to meet the challenge of democratic decentralisation is to keep administrators in place for at least five years. At the same time, they should be promoted in place, with salary advances, so that they will welcome this opportunity to remain in a given position, become emotionally involved, and do the best job possible. Unless this becomes a tangible possibility, I do not see how the current shifting pattern of administration will be able successfully to cope with the long-range needs of the panchayati raj institutions.

Yet another need is for the administrative bureaucracy to accept fully, emotionally as well as intellectually, the importance of the technician in the administrative structure. Technical positions, in which technical decisions, are made, must be held by men with specific and apposite training, and the rest of the administrative structure must rely upon these men for solutions to specific problems. India has had a long tradition of generalist administration, which admirably and wholly met the needs of a pre-development economy, but with the new needs of the country, the technician must be given his proper place in the administrative structure.

This agian is related to the process of panchayati raj. One of the main intentions of the overall process is to induce villagers to want to rely on science and technology as a means of improving their life and of devolving away from the traditional ways of doing things. But this can be accomplished only if the administrators themselves show, by example, that it is important to call upon the technicians and to give him a significant voice in technical questions. If the administrator himself does not rely on the scientific and technological knowledge available to him, there is no reason for the villager to do so.

Faced with the need for these shifts, I suggest that the administrative

structure must also take a close look at the training processes now available. This training must be re-examined, and its adequacy tested again and again. The emphasis, at this time, must be on development administration. More training must be given in the social sciences—sociology, social anthropology, and social psychology—to equip more fully the administrators who now face a problem of nurturing a process and creating workable institutions.

With these challenges and a variety of possible responses before it, the administrative bureaucracy has no choice but to continue to change. It must change in such a way that it will be able to evoke a new responsiveness from the people. In a very real sense, the administrative bureaucracy must accept that now and in the future, its effectiveness under panchayati raj will be measured by the responsiveness of the people to accepting the responsibility of solving their own problems. The effectiveness of the administrative structure will be gauged by the manner in which village people develop as responsible and responsive citizens capable of making wise decisions and by the way that village institutions—panchayats, cooperatives, schools, women's organisations, and youth clubs—respond to the problems before them. To create such a response and to make that response effective is the real challenge of democratic decentralisation, the real test now facing the administrator.



Democratic Decentralisation : The Idea, the Image and the Reality*

Iqbal Narain

THE POLITICAL scene in resurgent Afro-Asian countries presents a paradox. Two trends, seemingly opposed to each other, appear to be operating simultaneously—one is the trend of replacement of democratic structures by dictatorial regimes, militarist or otherwise; and the other of experiments¹ to provide firm and deep roots to democracy in the Asian soil and broadbase the democratic structure so as to make the common man a real partner in the conduct of his own civic and political affairs. The latter may well be called attempts at grassroots democracy. The situation becomes all the more intriguing when some of the non-democratic regimes appear experimenting with grassroots democracy, in all earnestness. The experiment of basic democracy in Pakistan and attempts at establishing panchayats with a view to providing a democratic base to the government in Nepal are illustrations in point.

The question may be asked: In what does the essence of grassroots democracy consist? Grassroots democracy stands for a political structure in which democracy is not merely confined to the national and regional levels but is also extended to local levels in a real and large measure. It is thus a medium of people's participation², which is not remote, and intermittent, and is not limited to electing representatives for a rather distant

*This is an abridged version of the essay which won the first prize in the IIPA Essay Competition, 1962. From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. IX, 1963, No. 1, pp. 9-34.

¹It may be worthwhile to point out that while referring to these attempts at *grassroots* democracy the word *experiment* has been deliberately used because one cannot be too sure of their efficacy as yet and one should, therefore, follow up the results with an open mind so that one may hope to improve upon them in the light of actual experience and through the rational process of trial, error and correction.

²According to Webster's *New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language*. Ind. edition, unabridged, 1960, p. 795, *grassroots* means originating among or carried on by the common people, as a grassroots political movement—colloq.

government—say, national or regional once in two, three or five years, but is based on their participation in the day-to-day conduct of public affairs of their own local area, village or town, as the case may be. Grassroots democracy is thus essentially decentralised democracy in which the management of public affairs does not begin and end at the top but operates through a wide network of people's participating units in the local area which form more or less a miniature government in themselves and are thus real centres of power and, therefore, of democratic thought and action. In brief, grassroots democracy is not just a window-dressing but an effort at sowing the democratic seed deep into the soil of a country.

THE IDEA

Some Basic Distinctions

The idea of decentralisation is in a way inherent in the democratic ideal in its application to political organisation. Democracy as a form of political organisation is an attempt at right ordering of people's partnership not merely in the sovereign power of the state but also in the day-to-day conduct of government. Though democracy as a form of political organisation has been differently described by political thinkers, yet the idea of maximum participation by the people is the common factor in their analysis. Thus, according to Mill, "the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate."³ People's participation forms the heart of democracy. The larger and more continuous and the more active, constructive and closer (qualitatively speaking) is the people's participation in the operation of their own government in a country, the nearer is it to democracy as a political ideal. Democratic decentralisation is one of the media of people's participation. It aims at associating people with the work of government to the maximum possible extent and in a living manner.

It might be asked: when the idea of decentralisation is inherent in the democratic principle, why should the adjective 'democratic' be prefixed to it? The prefix is not superfluous. It emphasises the purpose of decentralisation which is to provide a larger, greater and closer association of the people with the work of their own government.

The adjective democratic also distinguishes democratic decentralisation from administrative decentralisation. Administrative decentralisation originates in a quest for efficiency in terms of initiative, performance and speed of administrative personnel, particularly at the lower operative levels, while democratic decentralisation has its roots in the desire to associate more and more people with the work of government at all levels, national, regional and, more particularly, local. Administrative decentralisation implies the

³Quoted in *Masters of Political Thought*, edited by Lane W. Laneaster, Vol. III, George H. Harrap & Co. Ltd., London, 1959, p. 141.

right to the freedom of implementing a project which includes the necessary right to do associated planning from the operative standpoint. Democratic decentralisation, however, implies people's right to initiate their own projects for local well-being and the power to execute and operate them in an autonomous manner. It is thus wider than administrative decentralisation and the vital point of difference between the two lies in their purposiveness, the former laying stress on people's participation and the latter on efficiency.⁴

Again, the idea of democratic decentralisation is not to be confused with delegation or deconcentration.⁵ It is worth noting that even in some of the official publications this confusion appears to prevail.⁶ Even if some of the advantages between delegation or deconcentration and democratic decentralisation may be common, the two terms cannot be treated as synonymous. Delegation or decentralisation consists in the grant of authority from a superior to subordinate authority, to be enjoyed by him not in his own right but as a derived concession and that also to be exercised at the pleasure of the superior. Thus, in the case of delegation, as observed by Poul Meyr, "the central administration reserves its authority to issue direction and to reverse decision...the centralised organisation is integrated, i.e., it is built up in the form of a compact system of superior and subordinate units."⁷ Democratic decentralisation, on the other hand, is just an extension of the democratic principle—extension of people's right to manage

⁴Montague Harris has made a meaningful observation in this regard: "A distinction must be drawn between the terms local self-government and local self-administration....Dr. Goetz's thesis that self-government implies merely a form of communal administration—in other words, self-government is something less than self-administration. To the present writer the case is precisely the contrary. Local self-administration exists wherever there is local self-government, but it may also exist where a local authority merely carries out the orders of a higher authority, more or less in its own way. Dr. Goetz, like most Germans, is unable to realise that local self-government implies government by the people themselves, through freely elected representatives. He goes so far as to say that, while it is necessary for local self-government that the power to frame a policy should rest in some organ, it is immaterial what form this policy-framing organ takes. The power may be vested in the individual. This is the German view and has, ever since Steins reforms were abrogated, been the German practice. It is not the view of any one who looks upon self-government as government of the people, for the people and by the people." G. Montague Harris, *Comparative Local Government*, (Hutchinson University Library, London, 1948, p. 9.

⁵The essence of deconcentration which is not different from that of delegation has been expressed by Leonard D. White in these words, "It is a term generally used to denote mere delegation to a subordinate officer of capacity of acting in the name of the superior without a transfer of authority from him". Leonard D. White, *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. V, Macmillan Co., New York, 1954, p. 43.

⁶Seminar on Public Administration in Panchayati Raj at Savoy Hotel, Mussoorie, April 9 to 13, 1962—*Agenda Papers*, Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, Central Institute of Community Development, Government of India, Mussoorie, p. 1. (Here the two terms are treated as synonymous).

⁷Poul Meyr, *Administrative Organisation*, Stevans & Sons Ltd., London, 1957, p. 57.

their own affairs in a local area without any undue interference from regional or national authorities. Thus, while democratic decentralisation embodies a right, delegation is at best a concession. Democratic decentralisation is a matter of principle, and stands for enjoyment of original power by the people, while administrative delegation or deconcentration is the outcome of administrative expediency⁸ and is the exercise of derived power by a subordinate authority.

The term democratic decentralisation should also be distinguished from democratic centralism which is the basic organisational principle of governmental and party structure in Soviet Russia and China. The concept of democratic centralism, which at its face appears paradoxical, governs the inner organisational relationship between the people and the leaders in the party or the government, as the case may be, as also between the different tiers of the pyramidal structure of the party and the government. Thus, it has two aspects, first the intra-party or intra-governmental aspect, depending whether the principle is being applied to the party or the government, and secondly, the intra-hierarchical aspect.

In its first aspect, the concept seeks to combine democracy (mass participation and approval) with centralism (centralised leadership). The principle of democracy, at least in strict theory, is supposed to prevail insofar as broad policy decisions and the election of the leader in the party or the government is concerned. Thus the party line or the government line is determined with the express approval of the people who decide by 'majority vote' what their party or government is to do. The principle of democracy further obtains insofar as people are free to choose their leaders who are to be entrusted with the enforcement of the party or government line, as the case may be. The leaders thus elected are also to be responsible to the electors for the proper use of their authority and have to report to them and may be subjected to criticism by them, when the electors meet again to choose their leaders and decide upon broad policy issues. This much about the democratic content of the term democratic centralism.

Now to turn to centralism. Once the people have determined the programme in broad outlines and chosen their leaders, their freedom ends. The elected leaders at the top decide about execution of the policy and issue orders for the same. Now there can be no opposition, no factions, no criticism, no ifs and buts, no sabotage by the people. For, in strict theory at least, they can neither go back in the programme that has been decided with their approval nor can they disown the representatives they themselves have chosen. Thus, democratic centralism in its intra-party or intra-

⁸That delegation in its essence is a measure of expediency rather than right is well brought out by Mary Follett's observation in *The Illusion of Final Authority*: "Delegated authority assumes that your chief executive has the right to all the authority; but that it is useful to delegate some of it."—Quoted by Albert Lepawsky in *Administration—Art and Science of Organisation and Management*, Alfred A. Knopp, New York, 1952, p. 326.

governmental aspect means people's participation in decisions about the formulation of broad principles of work programmes and elections of leaders in party or government, as the case may be, and authoritarianism or complete subordination of the rank and file to the leaders in power, as far as the execution of the programme is concerned.

As far as the intra-hierarchical aspect is concerned, democratic centralism implies that there would obtain the relationship of a subordinate and the superior between the various tiers that constitute the party or the governmental structure, the lower tier being subordinate to the higher, though still enjoying freedom within its own sphere. Here the principle serves as an instrument for bringing about a balance between the needs of national unity and local autonomy, the former being secured through the principle of centralism and the latter through the principle of democracy.

The essence of democratic centralism in its two foregoing aspects has been well brought out by the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party held in 1917 in these words:

- (i) that all directing parties from top to bottom shall be elected;
- (ii) that party bodies shall give periodical accounts of their activity to the party organisation;
- (iii) that there shall be strict party discipline and the subordination of the minority to the majority; and
- (iv) that all decisions of higher bodies shall be absolutely binding on lower bodies and on all party members.⁹

The points of difference between democratic decentralisation and democratic centralism can now be enumerated. First, democratic decentralisation is centrifugal while democratic centralism is centripetal. Under the former, there is the transfer of power from top to lower levels, while under the latter there is transfer of authority (to the extent of complete surrender and concentration) to the top levels from the popular levels which form the base of the pyramidal structure. Secondly, the democratic principle finds a wider application in the concept of democratic decentralisation than in the idea of democratic centralism. Thirdly, under democratic decentralisation the underlying idea is to widen the area of democracy which may exist at the top by granting both authority and autonomy to people at lower levels. Here the attempt is to create democracies within the broad circle of democracy. The idea inherent in democratic centralism, however, is to provide a democratic base to the guided autocratic top. To sum up, under democratic decentralisation the emphasis is on the people's participation and autonomy, while in democratic centralism the stress is both on people's participation and authoritarianism, more on the latter than on the former.

⁹Harper and Thomson, *The Government of Soviet Union*, D. Van. Nostrand Co., Inc., London, 1952, p. 17.

If the end of the former is limitation, if not abnegation, of top level authority (as far as possible), that of the latter is its preservation and continuous assertion.

Characteristics of Democratic Decentralisation

It has been seen so far what democratic decentralisation is not. Let us now see what it is. The words, 'democratic' and 'decentralisation' form the key to the understanding of the synthetic compound expression democratic decentralisation. The word 'democratic' explains at once the nature and purpose of the concept as also its basic postulates in its institutional aspect. The word 'decentralisation' is essentially indicative of the method to realise the end as contained in the word 'democratic'. By itself, thus, the word decentralisation hardly has a democratic content and, as Montague Harris has pointed out, "decentralisation also means what deconcentration signifies, in spite of the fact that according to French usage, the former stands for local self-government and the latter for local state governments."¹⁰ It is thus only the prefix democratic that enriches the content of decentralisation. The latter when read with the former stands for transfer¹¹ of authority and grant of autonomy from top levels to the people at the lower levels in a three-dimensional manner:

- (i) taking of decisions about the programme and policy in a wide and duly specified area of activity—a function which is essentially political;
- (ii) controlling and managing of material resources needed to cope with the responsibilities thus devolved—a function essentially financial; and
- (iii) supervising, guiding and conducting the actual operation, a function essentially administrative—all these without undue interference from the top levels.

To sum up, democratic decentralisation as a political concept aims at widening the area of people's participation, authority and autonomy

¹⁰Montague Harris, *op. cit.*

¹¹Poul Meyr, *op. cit.*, p. 57, has used the word 'cession' instead of transfer which implies total and complete absence of control from top, while decentralisation in constitutional practice implies not so much absence of control but absence of undue control or interference on the one hand and the restriction of control to the minimum on the other. It is for this reason that the word 'transfer' is preferable, more so because it also covers the idea of downward flow of authority and autonomy from top to bottom levels, as indicated by the etymology of the word 'decentralisation'.

cf. Leonard D. White, "the process of decentralisation denotes the transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative from a higher level of government to lower." *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. V, The MacMillan Co., New York, 1954, p. 43.

through dispersion or devolution of powers to people's representative organisations from the top levels to the lowest levels in all the triple dimensions of 'political decision-making, financial control and administrative management' with least interference and control from higher levels.

Ingredients of the Concept

The foregoing analysis will bring home the following ingredients of the concept of democratic decentralisation.

First, as the word democratic indicates, the object as postulated here implies a larger and closer association of the people with their own government.

Secondly, with a view to pursuing this end, as the word decentralisation implies, there will be devolution or dispersion of authority from the higher levels of the government to the lower levels. Thus, the process of democratic decentralisation is vertical¹² rather than horizontal.

Thirdly, this dispersion of authority assumes the form of autonomy to the people at lower levels to take political decisions with regard to policy formulation and work programme, to devise ways and means to execute it, to manage and control the finances required for it and ultimately to guide and control its administration.

Fourthly, the authority thus decentralised should be managed by the people directly or indirectly through their representatives and thus the institutional machinery of democratic decentralisation should necessarily be elective; otherwise, it may be a case of decentralisation but not of democratic decentralisation.

Fifthly, it will further be in keeping with the spirit of democratic decentralisation that the conciliar principle should inform its institutional form as much as possible. The decentralised authority should vest in a committee and not become the monopoly of an individual, which would be the negation of the ideal of democratic decentralisation. Not merely this. The monopoly of power, whether in the council or the committee, by a dominant group has also to be equally guarded against. Otherwise, social harmony will receive a shock, forces of disintegration will gain strength and the democratic ideal will be compromised, because the minority will be ignored, if not suppressed altogether.

Lastly, the concept of democratic decentralisation as a political doctrine certainly limits, if it does not deny altogether, interference and control from above. In principle, it may be argued that it implies absence of control from above. This, however, is an extreme and purely theoretical view. From the practical standpoint there is no alternative to the view of Montague

¹²cf Poul Meyer, "Self government in the administrative sense of the term is a manifestation of democratic decentralisation viewed vertically. It occurs either in the form of administrative competence moved from the centre to local agency or in the form of agencies whose activities are limited to certain areas of the State," *op. cit.*, p. 241.

Harris that as far as the relation of local bodies to central government is concerned "complete independence is never accepted but as extensive a freedom as is compatible with a due subjection to central government."¹³ It is equally true, however, that undue, unwarranted and excessive control and interference from higher levels would strike at the very roots of the concept of democratic decentralisation.

Democratic Decentralisation and Local Self-Government

Having analysed the idea of democratic decentralisation and also having studied its ingredients, it may now be asked: How does this concept stand in relation to the idea of local self-government? Is it a case of old wine in a new bottle bearing a different lable or a case of fresh wine in a new bottle with an entirely new lable? It may sound paradoxical if one answers that it is neither, or that it is both. What is meant thereby is that the two terms are not identical; though at the same time they are also not vitally different from each other. Both aim at greater participation by the people and more autonomy to them in the management of their affairs. Both of them incidentally limit the control from above.

What are the points of differences? It can be said that democratic decentralisation is a political ideal and local self-government is its institutional form. There is also a difference of emphasis between the two, the former laying greater stress than the latter, in positive terms, on more or less complete autonomy at the bottom and, in negative terms, on no or limited exercise of control from above. On the other hand, democratic decentralisation is in fact a plea to further democratise local self-government to enable it to enjoy more authority, shoulder greater responsibility, take more initiative, and experience greater autonomy in the management of the affairs of the local area than what the local self-government institutions have been doing so far.

THE IMAGE

It is worthwhile to turn now to the Balvantray Mehta Report and find out how far the image of democratic decentralisation presented by it can be said to square with the idea set forth above. It may be observed at the outset that the Balvantray Mehta Report is at once an essay on the science and art of democratic decentralisation, dealing both with its theory and practice, with its basic postulates and institutional premises.

A Corrective Measure

The report has suggested the scheme of democratic decentralisation as a measure remedial to the failure of the community development movement, to evoke people's initiative and mobilise their voluntary and

¹³Montague Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

spontaneous participation. As a preface to the scheme of democratic decentralisation, the authors of the report have observed: "Admittedly, one of the least successful aspects of the community development and national extension service work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative."¹⁴ Visualising the remedy, the authors continue:

So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the 'local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality'* invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.¹⁵

The report, however, was not breaking an altogether new ground. It was the culmination of a thought process which was already afoot. As the report itself pointed out, "The proposals of the Planning Commission for the Second Five Year Plan, as accepted by the Parliament, stress the need for creating within the district a well organised democratic structure of administration in which the village panchayats will be organically linked with popular organisation at a higher level."¹⁶ Still the importance of the report lies in its emphasis on the need of democratic decentralisation and in linking it with the community development movement as a corrective measure.

The Concept

The concept of democratic decentralisation as developed in the report has an essentially rural context. The reason for this is obvious. The objective before the Balvantray Mehta Committee was primarily to study community development project and national extension service programme which was being tried in the rural areas. They, therefore, thought of democratic decentralisation not as an independent ideal but as an operative principle of the programme of community development and national extension service.

The authors of the report have taken pains to emphasise that decentralisation should not be confused with delegation which 'does not divest the government of the ultimate responsibility for the actions of the authority to whom power is delegated; this authority is under the control of the govern-

¹⁴Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development Projects and National Extension Service, V. I. Committee on Plan Projects, New Delhi, November 1957 p. 5 (henceforth referred to as 'the Report').

*Words borrowed from the Report of the Bengal Administrative Enquiry Committee (1944-1945).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

ment and is in every way subordinate to it.¹⁷ "Decentralisation, on the other hand, is a process whereby the government divests itself completely of certain duties and responsibilities and devolves them on to some other authority."¹⁸ The authors of the report have not been merely content with distinguishing decentralisation from delegation; they have also developed the concept in positive terms in the words:

...a single representative and vigorous democratic institution to take charge of all aspects of development work in the rural areas. Such a body, if created, has to be statutory, elective, comprehensive in its duties and functions, equipped with necessary executive machinery and in possession of adequate resources. It must not be cramped by too much control by the government or government agencies....It must... receive guidance which will help it to avoid making mistakes. In the ultimate it must be an instrument of expression of the local people's will in regard to local development.¹⁹

The Rationale

The report has also built up a cogent rationale for democratic decentralisation. According to the authors of the report, the initiative on the part of and participation by the community is basic to community development. This presupposes that the community should understand its problems and realise its responsibilities. Further, with a view to instilling a sense of responsibility, the community should be invested with powers to be exercised through its chosen representatives and maintain "a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration."²⁰

Fears and Doubts

The authors of the report were not oblivious of the pitfalls ahead. They refer to the fear that there may come about a "fall in efficiency".²¹ They, however, felt that inefficiency is due to institutional defects and can, therefore, be remedied. Another fear they have expressed is that democratic decentralisation may lead to corruption. The authors of the report have offered a detailed and critical analysis of the 'more complex' phenomenon

¹⁷Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development and National Extension Service, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 8. "The lack of efficiency of many of our present rural self-governing bodies has been due to too large a jurisdiction, too few powers and too scanty finances accompanied by an absence of close relationship with the village panchayats and wise guidance by government or political parties. Nor have any efforts been made either by the government or public or political organisations to impart any training in administrative matters to persons elected to such bodies."

of corruption:

Its causes are numerous: there is the ignorance of people which drives them through the fear of the machinery to pay its minions; there is the dilution of responsibility through various stages of delegation of powers unassociated with local opinion and there is the constant possibility of the emergence of privileged groups; power tends to concentrate in a few hands and remain there.²²

These, according to them, "can be eliminated only by constant and intelligent vigilance on the part of the citizens. This... is possible only if the electorate knows at least by name the persons in whose hand they have placed power."²³

They also recognised the possibility that factions and feuds might get accentuated in the wake of elections.²⁴ They were of the opinion that unanimity, if spontaneous and real, could be a possible safeguard against this tendency.²⁵ The authors of the report also referred to the fear "that a block area may not be able to find competent persons in adequate numbers to function as chairman and members of this block authority."²⁶ They, however, summarily dismissed this fear in rather strong words:

We do not share these fears; the country has found competent persons to take charge of its affairs at other levels; the needs and circumstances of the block level body will discover adequate personnel within its area.²⁷

It is obvious, thus, that the Balvantray Mehta Study Team opted for democratic decentralisation in full knowledge of the possible pitfalls which they thought would be got over gradually as a result of the democratic process itself.

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK : A BLUE PRINT FOR PANCHAYATI RAJ

The report did not merely embody the quintessence of the idea of democratic decentralisation, but also offered a blue print for panchayati raj which was to serve as the institutional framework of democratic decentralisation in rural India subsequently. They suggested a three-tier scheme

²²Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development and National Extension Service, *op. cit.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

with panchayats as the base, panchayat samitis as the intermediate tier, and zila parishads at the apex.

The Panchayat

The panchayat should be a directly elected institution with provision for the cooptation of two women members and one member each from the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The panchayats would have two-fold functions—one pertaining to civic amenities and the other relating to development.²⁸ Under the first head their compulsory functions would be “(i) provision of water supply for domestic use, (ii) sanitation, (iii) maintenance of public streets, drains, tanks, etc., (iv) lighting of the village streets, (v) land management, (vi) maintenance of records relating to cattle, (vii) relief of distress, (viii) maintenance of panchayat roads, culverts, bridges, drains, etc., (ix) supervision of primary schools, (x) welfare of backward classes, and (xi) collection and maintenance of statistics”.²⁹ About the second, the report says: “In addition, it will act as the agent of panchayat samiti in executing any schemes of development of other activities.”³⁰

The report also dealt with the problem of the resources of the village panchayats which “are necessarily inelastic and every effort should be made to assist them to add to them.”³¹ Besides serving as agency for the collection of land revenue³² on a commission basis and being entitled to receive from the panchayat samiti ‘a statutorily prescribed share of the net land revenue,’³³ (up to 3/4th of total realisation), their main resources should include: (a) property or house tax, (b) tax on markets, bazaars, *haats*, etc., (c) tax on carriages, carts, bicycles, rickshaws, boats and pack animals, (d) octroi or terminal tax, (e) conservancy tax, (f) water rate, (g) lighting rate, (h) income from cattle ponds, (i) fees to be charged for registration of animals sold within the local area, for the use of *sarai*, slaughter house, etc., and (j) grants from the panchayat samiti.³⁴ As a safeguard against the evasion of taxes, the report suggested, “a person who has not paid his taxes in the penultimate year should be debarred from exercising his franchise in the next panchayat election and a panchayat member should automatically cease to be such, if his tax is in arrears for more than six

²⁸Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development and National Extension Service, *op. cit.*, p. 7. It is worthwhile to point out that the authors of the Report did not make a distinction between civic amenities and development functions. According to them ‘development work’ includes: “agriculture, animal husbandry, co-operation, minor irrigation works, village industries, primary education, local communications, sanitation, health and medical relief local amenities and similar subjects”.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

months.”³⁵

The Panchayat Samiti

The report suggested that the panchayat samiti which would form the most important unit in the three-tier scheme should have a jurisdiction co-extensive with a development block.³⁶ Its members should be indirectly elected by the village panchayats³⁷ together with two women members and one member each from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (in case their population exceeds 5 per cent of the total population) as co-opted members. Besides, “number of seats equal to 10 per cent of the number of elected seats be filled by representatives of directors of co-operatives functioning within the block”³⁸ either by co-option or by election. The panchayat samiti would be the primary unit to deal with ‘development’ activities, as the panchayats would be too small to form a viable unit for the purpose.³⁹ It should also act as an agent of the state government to execute special schemes of development entrusted to it.

The authors of the report strongly urged “that except where the panchayat samiti is not in a position to function in any particular matter, the state government should not undertake any...developmental functions in the block area”.⁴⁰ To enable the panchayat samiti to act effectively as an instrument for development activities, its life should be five years, coming into being some time in the third year of the five year plan period. “The Samiti, once elected, will be able to see to the execution of the second half of the five year plan drawn up by its predecessor, draw up its own plan for the next period and shoulder the responsibility of seeing it through the first half of the period”.⁴¹ Besides it would have a supervisory role to play in relation to panchayats, entrusting to them development activities and approving their budgets, thereby safeguarding against the overlapping in the

³⁵Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development and National Extension Service, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 9. The Report considered other alternatives as well, such as tehsil or taluka, the sub-division or the district; yet the block was preferred because: (1) it “offers an area large enough for functions which the village panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to attract the interest and service of the residents.” (2) “Some of the blocks are already functioning as the developmental units and have been equipped for this purpose with adequate personnel in different fields”.

³⁷According to the Report, indirect elections did not necessarily mean that Sarpanchas should automatically become the members of the panchayat samitis. “The panchayats within the block area can be grouped together in convenient units which can be Gram Sewaks’ circles and the Panchas of all the panchayats in each of these units shall elect from amongst themselves a person or persons to be a member or members of the panchayat samiti.”

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

distribution of resources between the panchayats and panchayat samitis, the resources of the latter being: (1) percentage of land revenue collected within the block, (2) cess on land revenue, etc., (3) tax on professions, etc., (4) surcharge of duty on transfer of immovable property, (5) rent and profit accruing from property, (6) net proceeds of tolls and leases, (7) pilgrim tax, tax on entertainment, primary education cess, proceeds from fairs and markets, (8) share of motor vehicle tax, (9) voluntary public contribution, and (10) grants made by the government. The income from their own resources of the panchayat samitis could be further augmented by adequate grants-in-aid from the state government "conditionally or unconditionally or on a matching basis with due regard to economically backward area."⁴² The authors of the report particularly emphasised "all central and state funds spent in a block area should invariably be assigned to the panchayat samiti to be spent by it directly or indirectly excepting when the samiti recommends direct assistance to an institution."⁴³ The panchayat samiti should have an elected chairman, though "during the first two years after its creation...may have the sub-divisional officer, Prant Officer or Revenue Divisional Officer as the Chairman."⁴⁴

The Zila Parishad

The third tier of the scheme is the zila parishad which was suggested with a view to ensuring necessary co-ordination between the panchayat samitis in the district. They suggested that it should consist of the presidents of the samitis, MLAs. and MPs. representing the area and the district level officers. The collector should act as its chairman and one of his officers should be its secretary. Some of the more important functions of the parishad will be: (i) examination and approval of the budgets of the panchayat samitis, (ii) distribution of funds between the various blocks where allotment has been made for the district as a whole, (iii) co-ordination and consolidation of block plans, (iv) channelising the demands of the panchayat samitis for funds for special purposes to the government, and (v) general supervision of the activities of panchayat samitis.⁴⁵

Control and Guidance

The authors of the report also realised that the control of the state cannot be done away with altogether.⁴⁶ The emphasis of the report was,

⁴²Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development Projects and National Extension Services, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁶"A certain amount of control will inevitably have to be retained by the government, e.g., the power of superseding a panchayat samiti in public interest." (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

however, more on guidance than on interference. To quote the Report: "The panchayat samiti will need guidance in technical as well as administrative matters; but this guidance should, under no circumstances, result in excessive regulation or control; nor should such guidance or advice be considered as interference. With this object we suggest that the technical officers of the panchayat samiti should be under the technical control of the corresponding district level officers but under the administrative and operational control of the chief administrative officer."⁴⁷ The report thus pleaded for limited state control and a diarchical system of supervision and control.

The foregoing *resume* would show that the image of democratic decentralisation as offered by the Balvantray Mehta Report squares well with the idea given above. The report also developed an institutional framework in the form of the three-tier scheme with a view to capturing 'the image' in a living form. This became the blue print for panchayati raj in almost all the states, except Gujarat and Maharashtra where they were guided by the image drawn by their own reports on democratic decentralisation.

THE REALITY

The question now is: 'Does the reality bear out the image'? It is not possible at this stage to say decisively that the panchayati raj bears out the image in which it was conceived because it is still in its infancy.

We can, therefore, only study the trends and tendencies in the working of panchayati raj with a view to finding out whether these can be treated as 'problem areas' for the future. This is what is aimed at in the following paragraphs.⁴⁸

The Politics for Power vs. Community Development

The supreme test of the success or failure of the panchayati raj movement is whether it is predominantly treated as a power mechanism or as a medium of community development. It may be pointed out here that by its very nature it can neither be exclusively a power mechanism, nor exclusively a medium for community development. It has to be both; but in what proportion? The question is: Does the balance tilt on either side so much as to bring about weightage on one side and imbalance on another?

The answer to the question is not simple. If observations in the field over a period of a year in Rajasthan are a reliable index, it can be said that so far there has been, by and large, a balanced partnership between panchayati

⁴⁷Report of the Team for the Study of Community Development Projects and National Extension Service, *op cit.*, p. 14.

⁴⁸The trends and tendencies in the working of panchayati raj indicated here have been largely observed in Rajasthan where the author has been associated for over a year or so with a Research Project relating to the study of the working of panchayati raj.

raj as a power mechanism and panchayati raj as an instrument of community development. The result is that community development has not suffered a setback but received momentum in terms of the realisation of physical targets and people's participation.⁴⁹ Even when all the allowance is made for statistics as the proverbial 'third lie', it is a fact that people's participation has increased in comparison to pre-decentralisation days.⁵⁰

Credit for this balanced partnership should go to a great extent to the new rural leadership and keen watchfulness, supervision and guidance on the part of the State officials—perhaps more to the latter than to the former.

It should not be ignored that politics for power is on the increase and it should not be surprising if the delicate balance between panchayati raj as power mechanism and medium of community development and service is lost before long. The following trends deserve a mention in this regard.

The establishment of panchayati raj has divided every panchayat samiti and almost every village into a dominant and an opposition group, the former ruling to the disadvantage of the latter.⁵¹ Numerous complaints of discrimination in the distribution of benefits, e.g., taccavis, location of primary schools or health centres, etc., illustrate this point. Even the committees that distribute these benefits have the majority of the dominant

⁴⁹Study Team's Report on panchayati raj in Rajasthan, October 1960, Congress Party in Parliament, New Delhi, p. 9. The Report has made a significant comment on this which deserves to be quoted:

We saw the buildings of a primary school, a middle school, cooperative seed store, the actual construction of a drinking water well at an estimated cost of 30 to 40 thousand rupees and several neat-looking houses constructed in the village.

If despite acute party factions this has been achieved, it is a creditable performance and one cannot but give his meed of praise for it.

In *The Working of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan* (April 1961 to March 1962), Report, Evaluation Organisation, Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur, June 1962, p. 78 (henceforth referred to as Rajasthan Evaluation Organisation Report) it is stated:

The progress made by the development blocks, both shadow and non-shadow, in the year 1961 was considerably better than their performance in the year 1960.

This is also corroborated by: (i) *Report of a Study Team on Democratic Decentralisation in Rajasthan*, AVARD, New Delhi (see pp. 8-9), and (ii) Congress Party in Parliament: *Study Team's Report, op. cit.* (see pp. 7-8).

⁵⁰The increase in people's participation with regard to regular Development Blocks in Rajasthan is estimated at 78.3 per cent and in Shadow Blocks at 1240.9 per cent (*Ibid.*, p. 80).

⁵¹Congress Party in Parliament, Study Team's Report, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Compare the following observations:

- (i) "We also noticed acute party faction in a village panchayat, members of which had assembled in large numbers to meet us. From their talk it appeared that what one party claimed to achieve was hotly contested by the other who brought all sorts of charges against them openly."
- (ii) AVARD Report, *op. cit.*, p. 9. "On the debit side the carrying of power politics to the level of the local administration and increasing factions and groupings in the villages."

group. Personal, family and caste factions have thus come to the surface and got accentuated with politics, particularly election politics.⁵² New ones are also being created. A change in the nature of factions is worth noting here. Prior to panchayati raj, these were personal, family or caste factions. These have now become power factions. Some panchayats and villages belonging to the opposition group are already a prey to neglect and despair just for reasons of party politics.

New centres of power and prestige have been created, e.g., the offices of sarpanch and pradhan in Rajasthan. The halo that already surrounds these offices is bound to accentuate the lust for power to capture it and to hold it as long as possible by hook or by crook.

As a legacy of the third general elections, parties have permanently entered the rural arena. It has been realised in the wake of elections that village leaders—sarpanchas and pradhans—would increasingly control the votes of the rural masses. They have in fact controlled the votes to no mean extent even in the last general elections. Political parties, therefore, are busy strengthening their hold on panchayati raj institutions, keeping an eye on the panchayat elections and later on the general elections.

There has come about a build-up for power from the local levels to the state level. Sarpanchas, and more particularly the pradhans, have direct links with state-level leaders, particularly party bosses, the MLAs and ministers. The pradhan, who is a potential MLA, and MLAs and ministers who have to depend on his support to win elections have entered into a sort of partnership deal—a sort of political alliance to stand by each other. The result is that with the help of their political support, the pradhans can get action shelved—and even hushed up altogether, whatever the magnitude of their misdeeds may be. This naturally demoralises administrators who in utter disgust may be driven to relax the reins of supervision and control. It may be added here that the system of political alliances envisaged above presupposes either the preponderance of one political party at all levels or its desire to build up a cult to power from below. Pradhans and sarpanchas, knowing on which side their bread is buttered, are tempted to join hands.

⁵²In most cases it is true as Retzlaff has observed: "Elections in rural India offer an opportunity for competing groups within the villages to manifest their opposition. They reflect village factions and admittedly may even heighten tensions between them, but it is erroneous to say that elections cause factions. Factionalism existed in rural India long before statutory electoral procedures were introduced." Ralph H. Retzlaff: *Village Government in India* (Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 121.

But, as indicated in the body of the article, what Retzlaff forgets is the change in the nature of factions which were earlier personal, family or caste faction but have now become power factions.

THE STRUCTURAL ASPECT

The more important aspects about the structural pattern of panchayati raj can be discussed under the following heads:

Imbalance in Hierarchy

It has often been complained in Rajasthan that there is an imbalance in the hierarchical set-up of the three-tier scheme at both ends. The panchayat samitis have emerged as the strongest of the three-tiers, while the panchayats are too weak to serve as the executive arm of the panchayat samiti in its development activities and the zila parishad too weak to act as a co-ordinating and supervisory agency. To some extent this may be called a legacy of the Balvantray Mehta Report which, as shown earlier, has laid the greatest emphasis on the organisation, functions and role of panchayat samitis. The pivotal role assigned to panchayat samitis in various legislations has also been responsible for the imbalance. The panchayat samitis have also received the premium at the hands of district level officers.

The New Leadership—Development-oriented or Power-motivated

It can be said on the basis of study in Rajasthan that there is not much to feel pessimistic about the new leadership as far as the sarpanchas and the pradhans go. They belong to a comparatively young age group and come from well-to-do families and are normally more than literate.⁵³ They command influence with the rural folk. By and large, they understand their obligations towards the development of their village communities, talk about it in an animated manner, are keen (only perhaps a little less than their talks) on taking up development activities and take pride in their achievement in the field for development. The district development officers, the district level officers, and above all, the BDOs have done a lot for imparting development orientation to the outlook of the new leaders in Rajasthan. The training programmes for the non-officials, as provided for in Rajasthan have also a contribution to make in this regard. Their involvement in development activities has been, however, the most potent factor in giving a development orientation to their outlook. Thus, though the motivation of power has not been absent—and it cannot be absent—it has been subordinated to the ideal of community development. The situation, however, now appears in a melting pot as under political compulsion, particularly since the third general elections, as already shown, the motive of power seems to gain the upper hand.

As far as the panchas go, the situation is not very heartening. Most often they lack the qualities of leadership that characterises the sarpanchas

⁵³Interesting statistical information is available about "Pattern of Emerging Leadership" in 'A Report on the Panchayat Elections in Rajasthan, 1960'. Evaluation Organisation (Cabinet Secretariat), Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur, August 1961, pp. 26-32.

and the pradhans. They are neither development-oriented nor power-motivated. They are just docile. It will be wrong to say that they are handicapped by nature. The wrong lies elsewhere. They have not been involved in development activities which appear to begin and end with the sarpanchas, who monopolise both power and initiative in panchayati raj. The panchas⁵⁴ have thus become at best passive partners, toeing the line of the sarpanchas, and at the worst, silent onlookers. Their initiative has thus not been aroused; it has rather been allowed to remain stunted.

Sarpanchas and Pradhans—Primus Inter Pares or New Monopolists of Power

Democratic decentralisation has been a plea for broadbasing the power structure. In reality, however, as already stated above, power has not percolated beyond the pradhans and sarpanchas. Neither the pradhan can be called a *primus inter pares* among the sarpanchas, nor the Sarpanch is the first among the panchas. They are the new overlords who, of course, have a popular backing. There is thus an obvious tendency that power is getting concentrated into a few hands in panchayati raj—from panchayat or panchayat samiti to their respective committees and from the committees to the sarpanch or the pradhan, as the case may be. This concentration of authority is all the more injurious because it is conducive to building up a cult of power rather than a medium of community service and community development. This encourages pradhans and sarpanchas to find out ever new ways to strengthen their position and to channelise the use of existing devices to aggrandise their own power.

The Experience with Co-optation

The experience with the principle of co-option, as the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan once put it, "has not been happy". It has been used by the dominant group to strengthen its own position by co-opting its own supporters—at times even the family members of pradhans and sarpanchas. From the participation point of view it may be said that persons co-opted on the basis of their expertise—experience in administration, agriculture, etc.—have sometimes actively participated in the meetings of panchayat samitis. When their expertise has been fake and they have in fact been 'yes-men' of the dominant groups (as they most often are) the situation has been different. Lady co-opted members seldom attend and never participate. In the case of one panchayat samiti, the author could see the lady co-opted member only in one meeting, when a vote of no-confidence against the pradhan was to be discussed and hence she had to be present to add to the voting strength of the pradhan. Similar has been the situation with regard to

⁵⁴The Rajasthan Evaluation Organisation Report corroborates the author's experience in the field about the lack of interest, initiative and effort on the part of Panchas :

"Hitherto it has generally been noticed that the panchas do not take as much interest as would be desirable in the affairs of the village panchayats or in the development of the villages that they represent". The Rajasthan Evaluation Organisation Report, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

co-opted members coming from scheduled castes and tribes, except that sometimes—very rarely of course—they do speak. It may be observed, however, that the scanty participation by lady co-opted members and representatives of scheduled castes and tribes is understandable. They would naturally take time in getting over their inhibitions, born of seclusion in the case of ladies and compulsions of imposed social backwardness in the case of scheduled castes and tribes.

The Functional Aspect

The study of democratic decentralisation in its functional aspect has several facets. An attempt has been made here to touch upon a few aspects only, which have a particular bearing on the impact of panchayati raj on people's initiative, tempo of planned development, administration, social cohesion and so on. Reference has also been made to the more important difficulties that have been experienced so far.

Delegation, Decentralisation or Guided Democracy

Some basic issues are often raised with regard to democratic decentralisation: Has decentralisation really taken place? What has been decentralised or to give the question a theoretical twist "what can be decentralised in the context of developing countries like India which have chosen the path of planned development that is essentially a centralised process?" Some empirical answers to these questions are attempted here.

In terms of law, decentralisation is real. A study of various statutes dealing with panchayati raj in Rajasthan and elsewhere would show that panchayati raj institutions have been given wide powers. States reserving the right of intervention only in extreme situations. Panchayati raj institutions are thus legal persons enjoying statutory status and powers. It is thus a case of decentralisation and not delegation. The panchayat samitis are asked to work upon an area or block plan which they are expected to prepare in collaboration with panchayats which should first draw up plans for the panchayat areas. The block plans are then consolidated at the district level and later the district plans at the State level. In the process, local needs of the people are spotlighted and the minds of the local people reflected. There is much of pruning in the area plans before they become parts of state plan. Still all is not lost. The plan becomes broadbased. The planners at the state level have a better perspective with regard to local needs and resources as a whole. People develop a sense of participation and partnership.

It should be recognised, however, that the planning at the panchayat level at least has been more a ritual than a devout performance. The officials have to extend their guiding hand, whether it be the panchayat or the panchayat samiti level and the non-officials most often approve what the officials say. This is understandable also. When the ministers at the

national and state levels rely on the civil servants, the non-officials at the panchayat samiti and panchayat levels (who are far more amateurish) commit no offence in leaning on them.

Similarly, in the process of implementation also, the rural self government institutions have the freedom to spell out the details of the targets communicated to them from time to time for approval and implementation. Where should a primary school, or a primary health centre be located? How many wells should be dug and where? How should better seeds and better implements be popularised? How should 'school chalo andolan,' 'small savings' or 'rural insurance drive' be made successful and so on. Such questions are discussed and decided upon by the panchayat samitis, of course with the active help and guidance of the officials. They also allocate the budgetary resources for the various items that they choose for implementation. Again, the panchas and sarpanchas are active tools in the actual process of implementation. The officials serve as path-finders here also.

People's Participation—How far Real?

As stated elsewhere, it is a fact that people's participation has increased in comparison to pre-decentralisation days. Yet it is a long way off from the ideal. The villagers still cherish the psychological make belief, as an extension officer once put it, that the government should do everything for them. What is worse is figures of people's participation are boosted in the race for targets which has become a necessary evil today.

It is often said in responsible quarters that people's participation would appreciably increase if gram sabhas are activised with the grant of more powers. It is a premature step of doubtful efficacy, when participation in the zila parishad, panchayat samiti and panchayat meetings is confined to a handful of persons. The activisation of gram sabhas will be the culmination of a gradual process beginning with the activisation of the panchas, through them of their wards and ultimately of the gram sabhas. No hurried and mechanical device of the grant of more powers would do the trick.

Civic Amenities vs. Development Work

It has been complained that in the wake of panchayati raj a greater emphasis has been laid on civic amenities than on development work. It may be pointed out, however, that civic amenities are a part of development activities—a fact which has been brought in bold relief by the Balvantray Mehta Report in its scope of the term 'development activities'. In fact the line of demarcation between the two cannot be sharply maintained in a welfare state. Again, when people's elective local bodies will handle development activities, they have, as people's representatives, to care for the provision of civic amenities also. It cannot be denied, however, that civic amenities are not to be provided at the cost of development activities, because ultimately the latter would serve as the life-line for the former. As most of the panchayat

samiti funds are departmental grants earmarked for specific schemes of development, the danger of a serious imbalance between civic amenities and development work does not exist.

The Seeding-time for Democracy—Political Consciousness without Civic Consciousness

It may be pertinent to ask: Has panchayati raj nourished the seedlings of democracy in the country? It is again too early to pose this question. It may be observed, however, that political consciousness has certainly increased in the wake of panchayati raj. People have become conscious of their rights. They are also having a taste of power which they would not like to part with easily. Few panchayat samitis are even becoming a leveller of caste-identities which are gradually getting submerged in political affiliations. This is not so in panchayats, where caste is still a factor to be reckoned with. All this augurs well for democracy. What, however, does not do so is the fact that there has not been a corresponding rise in civic consciousness—consciousness of one's obligations towards the community. Should civic consciousness follow as a logical corollary of political consciousness? This the future alone would tell.

Peoples, Politics and Administration

It is also interesting to enquire: What has been the impact of democratic decentralisation on administration? The process of democratisation of administration has started; the gulf between the rural folk and administration is being bridged. Now an average villager walks into the office of a BDO with confidence, not to beg a concession but to claim what belongs to him as of right. The BDO also receives him well, listens to him with patience, and provides whatever redress he can. Thus, the fear about the birth of a rural bureaucracy has not come true.

All, however, is not well. Politics is increasingly at work. Political pulls and pressures at times create difficulties for administration. There have been occasions when even conscientious and effective BDOs, district level officers and the district development officers (not to speak of the docile and indifferent ones) have to relax their control and supervision to the disadvantage of panchayati raj. One of the extension officers told the author that extension officers were under triarchical control—technical control of their respective departments, administrative control of the BDO, and the political control of the non-officials. He added: "we should care for the political bosses and devil will take care of technical and administrative control". This is no doubt an extreme case. But it would be an eye-opener all the same. As a result of this, corruption is on the increase. Thus, the vicious circle—beginning with political pressure, leading to laxity in efficiency, supervision and control and ending in corruption and political nepotism and high-handedness—may be completed any day and anywhere. It may be

conceded that at present this is just a nascent tendency. But, if it is allowed to grow (and as the post-election politics in Rajasthan indicates, it may become so) this will be a sad day for panchayati raj.

Administrative and Financial Bottlenecks

It would not be out of place in the end to make a few observations on more important administrative and financial weaknesses in the system.

First, lack of identification with the movement on the part of officials would be suicidal for panchayati raj. It has been observed in Rajasthan that the interest of one Development Officer at the district level infuses life and vigour in all the panchayat samitis operating in a district. It is equally true that the qualitative tone of a panchayat samiti is set by the BDO and the Extension Officers working with him. It may be said on the basis of observations in Rajasthan that the majority of the officers have yet to identify themselves with the movement.

Secondly, it has been a matter of common experience that there is a plethora of complex rules and regulations which the non-officials and, in some cases, even officials find it hard to understand, not to speak of their correct interpretation and application. Such rules need be revised in the light of the difficulties experienced in their practical application.

Thirdly, the line of communication between the three tiers is very weak, if the experience in Rajasthan is taken as an index.

Fourthly, service points in administration at times look like independent islands and they behave in an arbitrary manner, as if there is no meeting ground between them. For example, it has often been complained in the meetings of panchayat samitis in Rajasthan that patwaris do not co-operate in *mehr-bandhi* drive, and other ventures because they are under a separate department (the revenue department) and under a separate boss (the tehsildar). A more typical example is of co-operatives which are supposed to be a supply link for the panchayat samitis and panchayats. If the two go hand in hand, the combination can work miracles. It was pointed out by a BDO to the author that in one of the panchayats where both the panchayat and the co-operative were controlled by the same group, the co-operative could build a road which the PWD failed to get constructed on even their higher rates. But a serious situation of rivalry, opposition and deadlock develops—as is the case in quite a few panchayats in Rajasthan—when one group dominates the panchayat and the other the co-operative.

Lastly, as far as finances go, the resources of the panchayats, at least in Rajasthan are so meagre that they cannot even afford a bare existence. Secondly, as the various audit reports show, there have been serious irregularities in expenditure. As the chief of an audit party pointed out to the author, "Most often the irregularities are examples of ignorance rather than deliberate mistakes." There is thus the need of a trained person to handle

the accounts. Thirdly, people's contribution by way of a matching grant has been mostly on paper. This leads to false accounts and incomplete works. Fourthly, panchayats in most cases—and to some extent panchayat samitis also—have been reluctant to tax the people. Lastly, the experiment of panchayati raj has been a costly adventure. It may be pointed out, however, that cost hardly matters if in the wake of panchayati raj the Indian people learn to walk on their feet with a sense of keen partnership in the onward march of the nation.

THE SUMMING UP : THE NEED OF POLITICAL SELF-CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INNOVATIONS

There is no need to be unduly pessimistic or panic-stricken at some of the existing weaknesses of the system. The democratic process is in itself a steadyng process—it works as its own school—as the corrective of many ills that appear overwhelming in the initial stages, when party politics appears to override democratic values. This should, however, not make the people in India complacent. The need of the hour is that Indian nation—political leaders, administrators and the common men and women, all put together—should have the courage to face facts, own the weak points of the panchayati raj and make concerted and earnest efforts to remove the defects.

It may be asked here 'How far will the slogan of partyless democracy at the local levels be helpful?' In spite of all the resolves to the contrary, political parties cannot dissociate themselves from participating in local politics. The third general elections have shown that their life-line would run from panchayats and panchayat samitis to state legislatures. An effort can, however, be made to bring about a gentleman's agreement between the various political parties that they would develop a convention to cooperate in the development of their village, irrespective of the fact whether they belong to one political party or another and whether they have lost or won in elections.

As part of this agreement, the ruling party at the state level may also pledge itself not to shield the misdeeds of pradhans, sarpanches and panchas in the larger interests of planned development and democracy in the country. This is a heavy demand; let us hope that political parties in the country would gain enough moral stature to meet it, in spite of the nascent character of Indian democracy.

It may also be useful to establish a 'Panchayati Raj O & M Cell' at the State level to deal exclusively with the administrative and financial bottlenecks. It should so devise administrative innovations as to safeguard panchayati raj not merely against the administrative and financial pitfalls but also against the baneful impact of political pressures, to whatever extent it may be possible.

As far as the process of identification of officials with the panchayati

raj movement is concerned, it is essentially a slow process; it can neither be superimposed nor injected. Still, if due importance is given in the training programmes and promotion prospects to identification on the part of officials with panchayati raj, the 'process of identification' can be smoothed in some cases and expedited in others.

Further, a high-level commission may be appointed to review the statutory pattern of panchayati raj in every state to formulate changes with a view to checking the monopolistic and discriminatory tendencies.

Neither the administrative innovations by the O & M Cell nor any statutory revisions can be called an unfailing remedy. There is after all a limit to which law can improve human institutions and remedy human failings.



Decentralisation and Panchayati Raj : A Development Perspective*

Shiviah

DEVELOPMENT', INDICATING the direction of historical change in modern times, characterised by an accelerating pace of technological advance, has the flavour of secular *teleos* about it. One need not subscribe to the doctrine of historical inevitability to be able to sense this flavour. Positivistic prevarications apart, recognition of the history-shaping power of liberal and socialist ideologies could be a useful point of departure. Their sweep might be a source of confusion. But certain broad aspects are clearly discernible. Risking tautology, we may say that their interaction intimates some core features of 'development' in our times. A degree of fusion has already taken place. What this fusion can mean to us is indicated by a simple definition of 'development': secular evolution towards a participant society. To be sure, an operationally clear synthesis of the egalitarian and libertarian dimensions of a participant society has not yet emerged. But the combined developmental thrust of these ideologies has in it elements which have a universalistic content. The stress on 'preferred futures' has to be suitably modulated if it is to make historical sense.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION

Students of public administration are not tired of saying that administration being an 'instrument' of the political executive, its character depends upon the political context. With the state assuming a major role in socio-economic change, particularly in developing countries, the primacy of the political factor provides a new dialectical variation of (in Rigg's terminology) 'fusion'. An additional dimension is the telescoping of the time-scale : Kwame Nkrumah's declaration—"What other countries have taken three hundred years to achieve, a once dependent territory must accomplish in one generation if it is to survive"—makes the point tellingly. One could readily

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXIV, 1978, No. 3, pp. 678-89.

concede the advantages of this generation in skipping or 'condensing' the historical stages. But the imperatives of nation building inevitably bring the political factor into a far sharper focus. Consequently, the process of administrative development in a prismatic society—'the process of becoming diffracted'—assumes a more complex character. In fairness to Riggs, we must appreciate the value of his 'prismatic model' in demonstrating the inadequacy of the Weberian typology regarding a 'neutral' and 'rational' bureaucracy. Enriched by a pan-disciplinary approach, this model presents a better differentiated spectrum of developmental continuum. 'Public administration' in prismatic societies is not the 'discrete and relatively autonomous system' that it is in several western countries; it is related to other functions and systems, similarly non-discrete and non-autonomous, in 'a single complex totality'.¹ He goes further and says that the prismatic model is 'intrinsically paradoxical'. "It cannot offer a direct or simple account of what, on deeper investigation, turns out to be a highly complex subject. In particular, the more prismatic a society, the more intermixed its 'administrative' structures are with its social, economic, political, and cultural aspects."² Even so, 'diffraction' defines the trend of administrative evolution.

We may recall at this juncture our observation earlier regarding the primacy of the political factor (in the context of socio-economic change) providing a new dialectical variation of 'fusion'—a fusion quite different from that associated with 'agraria'. Advance towards industrialisation need not be necessarily accompanied by a similar advance towards diffraction. In this respect, the countries of the third world have something in common with those of the second world. It is not suggested here that fusion of this type is preferable to diffraction. In the relatively narrow range of alternative futures (for prismatic societies) in the 'liberal-socialist' spectrum, much depends upon the pace of economic development and progress towards a participant society. However, an important implication of the foregoing analysis is that the developing countries have to contend with the problems of a 'higher' kind of fusion as they move towards industrialisation. In relation to public administration, they have, in other words, to contend with structural and 'emphatic' (Lerner's phrase) gaps. The situation demands greater sensitivity to means and details, and political and administrative skills of a high order.

Such a perspective, it is hoped, would facilitate a clearer appreciation of the issues involved in the present discussion about 'decentralisation'. As the title of this paper indicates, we are concerned here with a dimension of decentralisation associated with panchayati raj. Panchayati raj bodies are basically (rural) local self-government institutions. As such, they are not infrequently referred to as 'political' entities. There is, however, an important

¹Fred W. Riggs, *Administration in Developing Countries—The Theory of Prismatic Society*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1964, p. 65.

²Ibid., p. 99.

distinction between the national government—and unit governments in a federation—having plenary legislative and executive powers and such entities whose existence and powers are based upon revocable statutes and administrative orders. Moreover, the deliberative, executive and administrative functions show a greater degree of overlap at this level, and, therefore, a lower degree of differentiation. When it comes to the narrower realm of 'implementation'; the realities of grassroots life tend to blur the roles of officials and non-officials', a higher degree of fusion is inherent in the ecology of administration at these levels. In view of this, it would be more appropriate to describe these entities as quasi-political or political-cum-administrative bodies.

Consequently, decentralisation in this context can be spoken of as political-cum-administrative decentralisation. Administrative decentralisation generally refers to the transfer of authority or devolution from a higher authority to a lower authority in such a way that the lower authority enjoys a measure of functionally desirable autonomy; in the case of mere 'deconcentration' or 'delegation' this autonomy is less secure. Apart from the formal basis, much depends upon the human actors—their outlook, style, and equipment; the form of power has to be distinguished from the substance of its exercise. In a situation of formal 'deconcentration', it is possible to expect the substance of decentralisation in practice. Technically, however, devolution, indicating a higher degree of autonomy, goes better with decentralisation. Decentralisation will be used here in this sense.

With reference to the institutions of local self-government, decentralisation has a more complex dimension: political-cum-administrative. Elected functionaries enjoying statutorily defined autonomy have certain political status. For this autonomy to be real, there should be a corresponding degree of administrative autonomy. The enmeshing of administrative structures, with their line hierarchies traced to the state capital, has a vital bearing on the functioning of these institutions; administrative decentralisation would thus be a necessary concomitant of 'democratic' decentralisation.

Panchayati raj, however, is a qualitatively different type of local self-government apparatus. In the Gandhian framework, it was visualised as the base level of a radically decentralised polity. Though the polity established by the constitution has very little in common with the Gandhian model, the Gandhian inspiration has been conducive to a more radical conception of panchayati raj. This inspiration converged with intimations of the community development programme for a more vigorous democratic input into the apparatus of development administration. Panchayati raj thus goes beyond conventional local self-government.

PANCHAYATI RAJ AND DEVELOPMENT : BEYOND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The case for administrative decentralisation in general, and that for

local self-government, are well known. Administrative decentralisation reserves congestion at the centre, facilitates a speedier and more effective action with reference to urgent or peculiar problems 'on the spot'. Irrespective of abstract principles, technological backwardness, other things being equal, would entail a greater degree of decentralisation. This is an oversimplification, considering the nexus of technology with forms of socio-economic and political organisation and cultural configurations. Our feudal past provides a good illustration. Of special interest in this connection are the roots of local government in the feudal past, and farther back. At this juncture, we hardly need dwell at length on the distinction between local government and local self-government. Local self-government, in the sense of a complex of statutory bodies with a component of elected representatives and invested with certain powers of taxation, is a relatively recent phenomenon—barely two centuries old in most countries of the world. But local institutions, looking after aspects of local affairs, have existed since hoary antiquity, going back to the tribal matrix. Before the process of formalisation began, their basic sanction had been custom. Rural local institutions have been an important aspect of the socio-economic and political structure; and administrative requirements in relatively bigger political units add another dimension. Considering the place of custom in the total legal system, legal fictions concerning the discretion of the sovereign power cannot be taken literally. In England, the proposition that 'municipal liberties' are as much a part of the common law as individual liberties, indicates the sturdy base of local government in general.

Democratic theory, with its distinctly sharp accent on the needs, interests and susceptibilities of the citizen, imparted, by transforming local government into local self-government, a new dimension and justification to the former. The period during which this took place, spanning the evolution of the modern industrial civilisation, witnessed expansion in the activities of local self-government. To the traditional functions—watch and ward, charities, repairs to roads, bridges and churches—were added 'civic' functions—protected water supply, drainage, street cleaning and lighting, regulation of markets and traffic, and sanitation and health in general. Later, local public works and educational facilities joined the array; democrats also visualised local self-government as an arena of political education, and a nursery of representative government.

These are sturdy roots indeed. The case for local self-government in the context of a modern democratic civilisation can be summed up as follows: It increases the efficiency of the political system as a whole by reducing the scope for abuse of power and costly mistakes incidental to excessive centralisation, and by helping to improve the political judgement and capacity of 'ordinary' citizens through its 'nursery of democracy' role at the grassroots level; it serves as a feedback mechanism, a mechanism which is self-corrective in some respects insofar as the provision of services to citizens in the

proximate environment is concerned—services in which citizens are in general more interested, and by which they tend to judge the performance of a democratic government as a whole; and, above all, only local self-government would be in a better position to appreciate the environmental uniqueness of localities, and their problems, needs, styles and perceptions (Yes, styles and perceptions, for a locality has a personality, is a state of mind), and are in a position to cope with them in ways beyond the competence of centrally directed bureaucracies. These advantages, taken together, far outweigh disadvantages associated with 'local tyranny' and even, for that matter the relative 'inefficiency' of elected functionaries. It can be argued that these disadvantages could overcome through suitable organisational and educational devices. In any case, since problems like these impinge upon the socio-economic structure and politico-administrative culture, the assumed efficiency of the bureaucracy has to be weighted against very significant non-quantifiable gains of democratisation in terms of creating a psycho-social infrastructure conducive to economic growth. Such, one might say, is the latent efficiency of democracy!

Insofar as panchayati raj performs the traditional civic, welfare and regulatory functions associated with local self-government, these preliminary considerations are equally valid in its case. However, as pointed out earlier, it is an apparatus of development administration, and an expression of 'democratic decentralisation' of a relatively more radical variety. A glance at the categories of functions performed by the panchayati raj institutions (taking a comprehensive view of the picture in the country as a whole) would make the point clearer.

Gram Panchayat

Sanitation and health; public works; agriculture, forests and animal husbandry, village industries; welfare activities and promotion of voluntary bodies; education, sports and culture; and general administration and security.

Panchayat Samiti

Sanitation and health; public works; planning, coordination, supervision and execution of developmental programmes, including agency functions.

Zila Parishad

Public works; planning, coordination, supervision and execution of developmental programmes, including agency functions.

Civic, welfare and developmental functions cannot be classified too neatly; they are bands in a spectrum. Even so, the above list is helpful in having a broad idea. The traditional functions—civic, welfare and regulatory—figure prominently only at the gram panchayat level; planning, implementation and coordination of developmental programmes loom large at

higher levels. Given the magnitude of the task of rural development one can confidently predict that the developmental component will grow in volume and intensity.

There is a school of thought among administrators, academics and political leaders, that development administration, being primarily a matter of efficient implementation, panchayati raj has little utility beyond satisfaction of a doctrinal urge. A good cross-section of persons subscribing to this view are prepared to go along with democrats ('We are no less democratic than others'), but still plead that 'we should have our priorities right'. Between economic development and democracy, the former, being extremely urgent ('Accomplishing the tasks of centuries in one generation') should take precedence. In support of their stand, they point out how the functioning of panchayati raj has been isolated by factionalism, party politics, corruption, parochial loyalties, and inadequate appreciation of procedures and norms on the part of non-officials. On the other side are staunch democrats who assert that democracy should come first, irrespective of the contribution of panchayati raj to economic development. They are, of course, happy when told that in Maharashtra and Gujarat, where there has been a genuine transfer of powers and resources, panchayati raj institutions have done quite well. Should it be otherwise, they invoke faith in democracy as the final arbitrator; for democracy, or to be more precise, democratic decentralisation, is an end in itself.

The real world, however, does not admit of sharp disjunctions like 'democracy first and development later' or 'development first and democracy later.' In this connection, we might recall our discussion in the preceding section about 'development', the combined thrust of liberal and socialist ideologies towards a 'participant society', and the closed nexus between politics and administration, both as a description of existing realities and as a prescription for accomplishing the imperatives of nation building. In this perspective, it is worthwhile examining the extent of congruence between economic development and democratic input in development administration at 'local levels' in as 'concrete' and 'pragmatic' a manner as possible.

Community Development: The Context of Development Administration

The nature and structure of development administration in India has been profoundly conditioned by the community development (CD) programme launched in 1952. Of the several models of rural development—a vital task—India chose the community development model as being more consonant with its political system and aspects of its cultural idiom. Mobilisation of human and material resources (in a situation of scarcity), as harnessing them for rapid economic development was essential. Community development, with its accent on a people's willing cooperation, was considered a better approach. Those who sharply focus attention on the 'administrative' dimension of development administration, tend to gloss over the

democratic (political) dimension.³ D.J. Schler seeks to correct this : In community development "there is a definite input of democratic values, principles and procedures that, when applied in various settings of society, can be expected to *loosen rigid social structure.*"⁴ The rigidity of the traditional Indian society (An ascriptive order basically antithetical to the values of human dignity, equality and freedom) is well known. From the standpoint of economic development, loosening of this structure leading to achievement orientation, productivity, occupational mobility, the spirit of economic enterprise across a wide social canvas, and a 'modern' outlook involving a better appreciation of economic opportunities and their linkages with other aspects of life, is essential. Here is an aspect of the 'churning process' of democracy which, far from being dysfunctional from the standpoint of economic development, is essential for it. In a prismatic society, the problems of transition can never be easy. But from this it does not follow that the bureaucracy-dominated development administration is better conducive to economic development, or, for that matter, more efficient.

Bridging the Empathic Gap

This takes us to the 'empathic' gap referred to in the previous section. The degree of universalism, impartiality and rationality characteristic of western bureaucracies can hardly be expected in India even at 'higher' central and state levels. The situation is worse at the grassroots levels where there is a relatively greater degree of fusion. Power structure in rural areas is heavily loaded against the poorer and ritually 'low' castes. Apart from the traditional functionaries like the village headman and accountant, a host of 'government servants' at the local levels tend to be drawn mostly from the strata enjoying socio-economic and ritual advantages. When it comes to the question of attending to the needs and grievances of the people, the problem of the empathic gap is accentuated by the ritual distance; the secular distance, of course, is there in all its status-bound rigidity. Bureaucracy at the lower levels thus tends to be relatively more supercilious, unresponsive, and corrupt; and in a good number of cases downright oppressive. Because of the 'fused' character of the traditional rural societies, they are, if at all, only marginally better than non-officials in respect of parochial caste and other loyalties. To bridge this empathic gap, a structural innovation like the panchayati raj is very useful. In a prismatic society, loosening of the 'rigidity' of the lower bureaucracy through democratic structural inputs is

³Roscoe C. Martin (ed.), *Public Administration and Democracy—Essays in Honour of Paul H. Appleby*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1965, p. 171. The reference here is to extracts from Appleby's writings in John M. Gaus' contribution. Appleby thought that 'Politics in a democracy is peculiarly qualified to uphold the mass interest'. But he had a different opinion of 'democratic decentralisation'.

⁴D.J. Schler, "The Community Development Process," in L.J. Cary (ed.), *Community Development as a Process*, Missouri, Missouri University Press, 1970, p. 139, Emphasis added.

necessary both for social and economic development. Panchayati raj serves to bridge both the structural and empathic gap to a significant extent.

Institutionalising the Thrust of Community Development

The conceptual and historical nexus between CD and panchayati raj in India was clearly brought out by the Balvantray Mehta Report. An official document cited by it made the following points : 'In relation to the people, community development is essentially both an educational and organisational process....', and, 'to be effective, this demands the emergence and training of a new type of local leaders'.⁵ That new type could only be thrown up by the democratic process. The remedy for the patent inadequacies of the community development and national extension service programmes, to the Mehta team, and to numerous others in government, academia, etc., was panchayati raj. In a sense, panchayati raj could be regarded as a highly institutionalised version of community development. Its more direct contribution to 'efficiency', and development will be touched upon later. We may note here that the widest possible involvement of the people in developmental efforts is a gain in terms of legitimacy, and nation-building. A network of smaller democratic wheels, besides the giant ones operating at the central and state levels, impart resilience and strength to the political system as a whole. A factor like this is bound to have important economic implications.

Flexibility and Adjustments to Local Priorities

Besides 'modernising' bureaucracy at local levels, panchayati raj facilitates adjustments to local priorities. The World Bank Sector Policy Paper on 'Rural Development' (1975) has thrown valuable light on this and related aspects: "Local control provides the flexibility for the proper integration and timing of activities, and for the modification of programmes in response to changing conditions. Community involvement, which is essential to a sustained development process, is greatly facilitated by local rather than centralised control. One particular advantage is that the problems of the community, as perceived by its residents and those imputed by local officials, tend to be more easily reconciled."⁶ It may be pointed out that national priorities may sometimes come into conflict with local priorities. In any case, detailed knowledge of local resources and detailed planning for their full exploitation is beyond the ken of central and state governments. Panchayati raj can fill an important gap here.

Strategy of Rural Development: Implications of 'Small is Beautiful'

The issue of 'big' technology, or at least a proper mix of technology, is going to be increasingly important in the decades to come. The 'ravishing'

⁵For a detailed discussion, see Shrivastava, et, al., *Panchayati Raj: An Analytical Survey*, Hyderabad, National Institute of Community Development, 1976, Chapters II and III.

⁶World Bank's *Sector Policy Paper on Rural Development*, 1975, p. 7.

and 'stultifying' impact of giantism has been forcefully brought out by servants like Schumacher. A none too secure future—what with the growing threats to ecosystem, depletion of non-renewable sources of energy, and environmental pollution—is closing in on the present in a rather menacing manner. Both in the global and national perspectives, planning of a type geared to a more rational (non-violent) utilisation of local resources, will be necessary. In the national context, moreover, industrialisation of the western type may not be able to deliver the goods, even if it were desirable. In her book, *The Lonely Furrow*, Kusum Nair has pointed out that even if the whole industrial apparatus of the USA were to be planted in India overnight, it could take care of only one-third of India's population. We have no effective alternative to labour-intensive approach, an approach which is in harmony with the 'small is beautiful' thesis. All this entails planning for local resource use of a very sophisticated nature, and organisational and educational efforts on the widest possible scale. The foregoing discussion shows that panchayati raj is an effective instrument for accomplishing these tasks.

Structural Change in the Economy, Intermediate Technology, and Intermediate Aggregation

It is well known that in relation to the requirement, the average annual growth rate of 3.1 per cent so far is grossly inadequate. According to the projections worked out by the Economic Research Division of the Birla Institute of Scientific Research, to achieve even a modest structural change in the economy—to increase the share of industry from its 1970-71 level of 14.6 per cent to 32.5 per cent by 2000-2001—a growth rate of 10 per cent would be necessary.⁷ Mobilisation of resources on a massive scale, on the basis of a relatively labour-intensive technology or intermediate technology, and their rational utilisation through sophisticated planning and efficient implementation, are tasks beyond the competence of the Central and State governments, except in a constructive, vicarious sense. Only panchayati raj can deliver the goods—and should be enabled to. Only panchayati raj can facilitate a close fit between multi-level technology and multi-level planning, through local involvement and guidance. (That it is desirable to design panchayati raj in such a way that the needs of location-specific, multi-level planning are met, is a different proposition.) The contribution of an institutional support of this nature to fuller development and utilisation of local resources, in the context of multi-level planning, was clearly appreciated by the National Commission of Agriculture.⁸ We may add that the indirect contribution of panchayati raj to development is equally significant; the modernising potential of 'intermediate aggregation' (Rajni Kothari's

⁷Economic Research Division of the Birla Institute of Scientific Research, *India: 2001*, New Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1976.

⁸Government of India, *Report of the National Commission on Agriculture*, Part XIV, pp. 1-2.

phrase) engulfs attitudinal and structural changes conducive to economic development.

Efficiency and Responsiveness: Evidence of Cornell Study

In a brief paper like this, it is not possible to cover all the nuances of supportive evidence. We would, therefore, content with a brief summary of a very well organised empirical study conducted by Prof. Norman Uphoff and Prof. Milton Esman of the Cornell University. The findings relate to 16 countries: Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The categories of analysis were : planning and goal setting; resource mobilisation; provision of services; integration of services; control of administration; and making claims. And the findings: Involvement of rural organisations in rural development makes a significant contribution to the "effectiveness of planning and the efficiency with which available resources can be utilised", to the maximisation of resources; to the provision of inputs and services; to the integration of these services and their timely supply by communicating requirements and voicing complaints; to the strengthening of administrative accountability; and to the articulation and processing of demands of the rural people in general, and the intended beneficiaries in particular, so that "the goals, priorities and operations of rural development programmes can be responsive to or at least take account of their requirements."⁹ These contributions add up to a critical factor in the developmental matrix. It may be clarified here that the expression 'local organisations' used in this monograph is wider in connotation. But insofar as they include panchayati raj institutions, the findings are of direct interest to us.

Panchayati raj institutions, thus, have a vital role in rural development, which is quite different from saying that other factors are not important. The following passage from the monograph referred to above throws valuable light on the '*key significance*' of *linkages*. "Organisation for rural development must be seen as a *system* of institutions performing various functions in the rural sector of a particular country. We found no case where only one institution was carrying the full responsibility for rural development or where *complementaries* among institutions were not as important as what the institutions themselves did. Of key significance was the extent and effectiveness of *linkages* between and among institutions, horizontally with other organisations and structures at the same level and especially vertically between local organisations and structures at the centre of government which set policy and allocate resources essential to success on rural development."¹⁰

⁹Norman Uphoff and Milton Esman, *Local Organisations for Rural Development, Analysis of Asian Experience*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974 (mimeo.), Chapter II.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. xii.

MANAGEMENT AND POLICY SCIENCES PERSPECTIVE

The points made above indicate, in rough outline, the contribution that panchayati raj can make to economic development. The contribution, however, cannot be viewed in isolation from the horizontal and vertical linkages; in fact, much depends upon how skilfully we organise these linkages. A doctrinaire approach to panchayati raj will thus be self-defeating in the ultimate analysis. Reification of institutions is bad; very few indeed, would regard panchayati raj as an end in itself.

Given the imperatives of rapid economic development, the stress on performance (as management exponents would put it) should be more, not less. The gigantic task of national development presupposes initiatives at, and guidance from, higher levels. But the action is in the field. Peter Drucker said of MBO: "Indeed, one of the major contributions of management by objectives is that it enables us to substitute management by self-control for a management by domination."¹¹ So we have 'participative' management, participative in the functional, not populistic, sense of the term. Drucker has convincingly shown how broad vision goes well with higher performance goals: Management "will increasingly stand for the quality of life of a society as much as for its standard of living".¹² A similar approach to more complex organisations like panchayati raj would be of great value.

The fallacy—or is it danger?—lies in dichotomisation. Instead of asking centralisation or decentralisation, we should ask what is the appropriate mix between centralisation and decentralisation so that the objective of a higher standard of living *with* quality of life is achieved as effectively as possible. 'Hard headed' persons, preoccupied with 'productivity' in a segmental way, have little patience with things like social justice and democracy. If we appreciate the historical context touched upon at the beginning of this paper, they are probably not 'hard headed' enough. Apart from Schumacher, we have a warning from another influential writer, Alvin Toffler. Pointing out the dangers of technocratic myopia, based on elitist premises, he pleads for 'anticipatory democracy'.¹³ "Yet systems of goal formulation based on elitist premises are simply no longer 'efficient.' In the struggle to capture control of the forces of change, they are increasingly counter-productive. For, under super-industrialisation, democracy becomes not a political luxury, but a *primal necessity*." And a pervasive kind of democracy at that. "Democratic political forms arose in the West not

¹¹Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management*, London, Pan Books, 1973, pp. 161-62.

¹²Peter F. Drucker, *Management—Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, London, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 34-36.

¹³Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, New York, Bantam Books, 1972 (21st printing), p. 470. Title of section.

because a few geniuses willed them into being or because man showed an 'unquenchable instinct for freedom.' They arose because the historical pressure towards social differentiation and towards faster paced system demanded sensitive social feedback. In complex differentiated societies, vast amounts of information must flow at ever faster speeds between the formal organisations and sub-cultures that make up the whole and between the layers and sub-cultures within these."¹⁴ The feedback from layers represented by panchayati raj would be quite valuable from this point of view.

On the basis of this feedback, policy makers and administrators or managers should be able to evolve improved tools, procedures and methods. 'Administration by consent' cannot be treated as an excuse for, or a justification of, a policy of muddling through.¹⁵ What is required is an integrated perspective, of the kind provided by a relatively new field of systematic studies known as 'policy sciences'. Harold Lasswell, a pioneer, identified the five intellectual tasks involved in these studies: clarification of goals, description of trends, analysis of conditions, projection of future developments, and innovation, evaluation and selection of alternatives. A tall order! But the important thing is the perspective (or wisdom if you like). As far as administration is concerned, a related consideration is: " 'policy' and 'administration' are seen as ranges on a larger continuum."¹⁶ Feedback from 'lower' layers would be used for improving operational policy, and so on. In such a perspective, administrative myopia has as little room, say, as technocratic myopia. The real challenge lies in combining broad vision with higher performance goals. In a paper, bearing the interesting title 'Strategy for Economic and Social Development', Bertram Gross wrote: "Two aspects of the growing gulf between management techniques and human needs deserve attention : the triumph of tactics over strategy and the retreat from human values."¹⁷ A well designed system of panchayati raj should help restore the balance in some ways.

¹⁴Alvin Toffler, *op. cit.*, p. 475. Emphasis added.

¹⁵Yehezkel Dror, *Ventures in Policy Sciences—Concepts and Applications*, New York, Elsevier, 1971, p. 260. Chapter 24 contains an interesting of Lindblom's thesis regarding 'Muddling through'.

¹⁶John P. Crecine, "University Centres for the Study of Public Policy: Organisational Viability," *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1971, p. 8.

¹⁷Bertram M. Gross, "Management Strategy for Economic and Social Development," *Ibid.*, p. 369.

Organisational Analysis of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India*

S.N. Dubey†

DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION popularly known as 'Panchayati Raj' has historical, ideological and organisational relationship with community development programme.¹ The community development is a national programme; and covers the entire rural population which comprises over 75 per cent of the total Indian population. The present shape of the programme has evolved through several phases. The first began with opening of 15 pilot projects in various states in India. The second was the establishment of 55 community development projects on October 2, 1952. The third phase commenced with the initiation of national extension service in October, 1953.² The number of blocks went on increasing from year to year, and by October, 1967, the total number of blocks reached 5,265.³ The goals of the community development programme can be summarised as follows : (i) to increase substantially the agricultural production in the country, improve nation's communication system, health and hygiene, and promote education in villages; and (ii) to generate and direct a process of integrated social, economic and cultural change with the ultimate aim of transforming social and economic life in the villages.⁴ Though the official machinery was created to guide and assist the planning and the implementation of the programme, the main responsibility for improving the

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¹S.K. Dey, "Faith in panchayati raj", *Kurukshestra*, Vol. 9, pp. 4-16.

²S.C. Dube, "Bureaucracy and Economic Development", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XII, pp. 343-51.

³Rajeshwar Dayal, *Panchayati Raj in India*, Delhi, Metropolitan, 1970, p. 6.

⁴S.N. Dubey, "Organisational Tension in the Community Development Blocks of India", *Human Organisation*, Vol. 28, p. 65.

socioeconomic conditions in the village was to rest with the people themselves. It was argued that unless people considered community development as theirs, and values it as a practical contribution to their own welfare, no substantial result could be gained. Consequently, the people's participation in the planning and the execution of the programme was considered a vital aspect of community development and was sought by setting up of project advisory committees consisting of non-officials in project areas.⁵

The programme, however, failed to involve the people in the planning and implementation of the programme. It was noticed that the community development programme, instead of being people's programme with government's assistance, was becoming more and more government's programme with varying degree of people's participation.⁶ The block advisory committees, created to enlist popular support and participation in the programme lacked capacity, vitality and power to represent people's points of view.⁷ The village panchayats were also found weak and ineffective to mobilise the masses in support of the programme. Besides, in most of the states, there was no organisation at the block level to represent the people's will.⁸

It was under these circumstances that the National Development Council constituted a committee on plan projects which appointed a study team for community projects and national extension service in 1957 headed by Balvantray Mehta to assess, along with other things, the extent to which community development programme has succeeded in utilising local initiative and in creating institutions to ensure a continuity in the process of socio-economic change.⁹ The team concluded that the popular participation in the community development programme enlisted through *ad hoc* advisory bodies was not adequate, and a separate set of institutional arrangement would have to be statutorily created to make the participation meaningful and effective. The team suggested a three-tier system of institutional arrangement, namely, *the village panchayat*, *the panchayat samiti*, and *the zila parishad*, and recommended that the entire development work should be transferred to these bodies.¹⁰

⁵Planning Commission, *First Five Year Plan*, Delhi, Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1952.

⁶Rajeshwar Dayal, *op. cit.*

⁷B. Maheshwari, *Studies in Panchayati Raj*, Delhi, Metropolitan, 1963, p. 8.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹Committee on Plan Projects, *Report*, New Delhi, 1957.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 7-18.

THE RATIONALES FOR PANCHAYATI RAJ

~~Three~~ basic rationales* can be identified for the creation of panchayati raj institutions as follows:

To make community development programmes relevant to the needs and problems of the people

One of the criticisms of the community development programmes is that a large number of programmes were organised in rural areas without due regard to the needs, interests and life-style of the rural population. In other words, lacking in basic involvement of the people, programmes were found generally inappropriate, fragmented and unsuitable to the life-style of villagers. Consequently, some of the programmes failed to make any lasting and positive impact on the condition of poverty; and a majority of the villagers remained poor living in an atmosphere of apathy.¹¹

It was, therefore, considered important to involve the rural population in the programme in order to obtain a realistic perspective on the appropriateness and effectiveness of community development programme—a perspective free from biases stemming from considerations of careerism and public relation needs of departments and their personnel. It was argued that the villagers were in the best position to define their own needs. The study team consequently observed that

so long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local projects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.¹²

To transfer decision-making authority to villagers regarding developmental work

One of the rationales of panchayati raj is to transfer decision-making authority to villagers and their elected bodies regarding developmental matters. Though the second five year plan stressed the need for creating within the district a well organised democratic structure of administration in which village panchayats would be organically linked with popularly elected organisations, such as district boards, whose functions would include the entire general administration and development of the area,

*The similar rationales have been advanced for the "maximum feasible participation of the poor" in the Community Action Programme in the United States which has been launched to bring about a rapid social and economic development of disadvantaged communities [Sumati N. Dubey, "Participation in the Community Action Programmes: Issues and Confusion", *Social Work*, Vol. 15 (1970), pp. 76-84].

¹¹R.W. Poston, *Democracy Speaks Many Tongues*, New York, Hamper and Row, 1962.

¹²Committee on Plan Projects, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

administration of justice, and certain functions pertaining to the revenue administration, the district boards had neither the tradition nor the resources to take up this work. They had also been handicapped by having too large a charge to receive their detailed attention. The chairman and members of the district boards were not in a position to give any considerable portion of their time to the affairs of such a vast area. The very size of its charge, therefore, necessitated the delegation of a very large area of authority and discretion to its own officers, the effect of which was to replace state officers drawn from larger cadres by officers of limited experience in restricted fields. Further, the linking of village panchayats directly with the district boards was not easy and practical since a district consisted of hundreds of village panchayats. The block advisory committees generally appointed to represent people's perspective in the community development programme did not have enough powers and authority to make decisions in developmental matters of their areas. The district planning committees were further powerless and ineffective. The study team, therefore, recommended a single representative institution, called panchayat samiti, to take charge of all aspects of developmental work in the block area. The panchayat samiti was recommended as a statutory and elective body with comprehensive functions in the area of development and with authority and sources to discharge these functions.¹³ Thus, panchayati raj institutions seem to be designed to create a power base for the people in rural areas by providing them control over programmes, funds, jobs, information and by granting them legal, constitutional, and official status.*

Value of Participatory Democracy

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. Panchayati raj is considered a foundation of participatory democracy in India. Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the well-known leaders of Indian democracy, observed that it is a matter of great satisfaction that in our country a beginning has already been made in laying the foundation of participative democracy in the shape of panchayati raj or what was called at first "democratic decentralisation".¹⁴ S.K. Dey pointed out that, in panchayati raj system, the people of India would govern themselves through their representatives

¹³Committee on Plan Projects, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

*Benfield observes that concerted action for any purpose necessitates creation of more or less elaborate system of influence and power (Edward C. Benfield *Political Influence*, New York, Free Press, 1961). Where does this influence come from? According to Dahl, among the sources of influence, most important are money and credit, control over jobs, control over information, social standing, and legal and constitutional status [Robert A. Dahl, "The Analysis of influence in a Local Community". Charles Adrian (ed.), *Social Science and Community Action*, East Lansing, Michigan State University, 1960, pp. 24-42].

¹⁴Jayaprakash Narayan, *Communitarian Society and Panchayati Raj*, Varanasi, Indraprastha Press, 1970, p. 75.

in institutions from the panchayat to parliament and thus the democracy would travel from Lok Sabha to gram sabha. Panchayati raj thus reflects the concept of inter-connected democracy from the gram sabha to Lok Sabha.¹⁵

ORGANISATION PATTERN OF PANCHAYATI RAJ

The study team recommended a three tier organisational structure for the panchayati raj. *The village panchayat* with elected representatives of the adult population in the village was the lowest unit; *the panchayat samiti* consisting of the sarpanches of panchayat samitis in the block area at the intermediate level; and the *zila parishad* with chairman of panchayat samitis as *ex officio* members at the district level. An examination of the organisational structure of the panchayati raj institutions in various states reveals that, though the ideals and basic objectives of the institutions are identical in all the states, their powers, mode of representation of the people, and the nature of interrelationship among them are not uniform.¹⁶ Variations among these institutions have been observed frequently in respect to the unit of devolution—at some places it is the district while at the other places it is the block or tehsil—and the mode of representation, which in some states is through direct election while in other states it is through indirect election or by both. For example, the state of Rajasthan adopted the panchayati raj pattern suggested by the study team in toto and accordingly made panchayat samiti the most powerful body by making it responsible for the planning and the execution of all the developmental programmes. The zila parishad is only a supervisory and coordinating body. A special feature of the scheme is that the zila parishad cannot modify the budget proposals of panchayat samitis even though it can return the proposals with a suggestion to modify these. Another feature of the pattern is the total exclusion of officials from membership of both the samiti and parishad. The panchayat samiti consists of directly elected sarpanches of village panchayats in the area, the representatives of scheduled castes, tribes, and cooperatives.¹⁷ The State of Andhra Pradesh has provided planning and executive powers to both the panchayat samiti and zila parishad. Developmental programmes of all the departments of the government, including maintenance of minor irrigation and welfare of backward classes, have been transferred to the samiti and the parishad. The parishad has, in certain areas, supervisory powers while in others it has executive powers. The mode of representation to panchayat samiti and zila parishad in Andhra Pradesh is similar to the mode adopted by the State of Rajasthan. The pattern

¹⁵ S.K. Dey, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-16.

¹⁶ B. Maheshwari, *op. cit.*, 25; Rajeshwar Dayal, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39; Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-112; R.V. Jathar, *Evolution of Panchayati Raj in India*, Dharwar, The Institute of Economic Research, 1964, pp. 58-102; and Government of Maharashtra.

¹⁷ Rajeshwar Dayal, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-44; and R.V. Jathar, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-90.

adopted by Maharashtra is different from both Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. The zila parishad in Maharashtra is the most powerful body. The main functions of the zila parishad are planning and execution of all developmental programmes, primary, basic and secondary education, distribution of fertilisers, agricultural implements, improved seeds, etc. Thus, the zila parishad is a strong unit with wide powers and responsibilities. Table at page 53 indicates the different patterns of panchayati raj prevailing in the states of the union based on the devolution of executive powers and the mode of direct election of the representatives to panchayati raj institutions.

ORGANISATIONAL DILEMMAS IN PANCHAYATI RAJ

The organisational dilemmas of panchayati raj seem to arise largely from the nature of organisational relationship: (1) among the personnel working in the block administration, and (2) the block administration and panchayat samiti. Sociologists studying modern bureaucracy have pointed out that some structural characteristics of bureaucratic organisations tend to create strains, both in terms of organisational goals, and in the inter-personal relationship among the staff¹⁸, for example, points to some of the problems that arise when an administrator whose authority is based on incumbency of the office rather than specialised knowledge exerts control over subordinates whose technical specialisation and organisational experience differ from his own. Harvey Smith's study similarly reveals that there can be a serious incongruence between the exercise of scalar and functional authority which tends to create conflict in bureaucratic organisations.¹⁹

Some of the concepts developed in the organisational literature seem useful and relevant in the analysis of organisational dilemmas in the panchayati raj and community development administration. The main structural variables which seem most relevant in the analysis of organisational tension in the panchayati raj institutions are : (1) the multiple system of control over the staff in panchayati raj ; (2) supervision of the technical personnel by generalist administrator and by non-technical representatives in panchayat samitis; and (3) role conflicts amongst personnel.

The Multiple System of Control over Personnel

Studies of bureaucratic organisations in the western countries have shown that a dual system of control over the personnel of an organisation

¹⁸Harvey L. Smith, "Two Lines of Authority : The Hospital's Dilemma" in Garthey Jaco (ed.), *Patient, Physician and Illness*, New York, Free Press, pp. 468-9; Melville Delton, "Conflict Between Staff and Line Managerial Officers", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 15, pp. 342-51; and Alvin W. Gouldner, "Organisational Analysis" in Lenoard S. Kogan (ed.), *Social Science Theory and Social Work Research*, New York, National Association of Social Workers, 1960, p. 55.

¹⁹Harvey L. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 468-91.

PATTERN OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN STATES OF THE UNION BY LOCATION OF EXECUTIVE POWERS AND DIRECT METHOD OF ELECTION IN NINE STATES*

State	Method of Election			Executive and Supervisory Powers		
	Panchayat Samiti		Zila Parishad	Panchayat Samiti		Zila Parishad
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect	Executive	Supervisory
Andhra Pradesh	—	—	—	+	—	+
Assam	+	—	—	+	+	—
Bihar	—	+	—	+	+	—
Gujarat	—	+	—	+	+	+
Madras (now Tamil Nadu)	—	—	—	+	—	—
Maharashtra	+	—	—	+	+	+
Orissa	—	—	—	+	—	—
Punjab	—	—	—	+	—	+
Uttar Pradesh	—	—	—	+	—	+

*Other states have not been included because of the lack of information and due to the non-existence of some of the panchayati raj institutions. The table is based on the data published in 1964 (R. V. Jathar, *Evolution of Panchayati Raj in India*, Dhawtar, Institute of Economic Research, 1964, pp. 58-99).

KEY : +Presence of direct election, executive and supervisory powers.
—Absence of direct election, executive and supervisory powers.

leads to organisational tension between scalar, and functional authorities when scalar authority (which is based on the office one holds) and functional authority (which rests on the specialised roles one plays in the organisation) do not reside in the same person, conflict is likely to occur.²⁰ In hospitals, for example, where scalar and functional authorities are vested in the hospital administrator and the doctor respectively (the former tends to emphasise administrative procedures and the economy of resources while the latter's overriding concern is with professional standards and the providing of service rather than with administrative rules and policies), the lower ranking personnel are often under the dual control of both the doctor and the administrator whose orders and instructions are frequently contradictory.²¹

This conceptual framework is very useful in analysing India's organisation of panchayati raj and community development. The administration of Indian community development programme is linked with technical departments, such as agriculture, veterinary science, cooperatives, public health, and like. This has been accomplished by adding community development blocks to the general administration with the collector at the district level acting as the chief developmental officer, and by putting the technical personnel at the block level under the administrative control of the block development officer while at the district level keeping them professionally responsible to their departmental heads.²² In other words, extension officers, who are technical personnel in the block, are administratively under the control of the block development officer, while their technical supervision lies in the hands of their district technical officers.²³

With the introduction of panchayati raj, a new system of control by the non-technical persons over the technical personnel working in the community development programme has been introduced. For example, non-official representing panchayati raj at the district level is the president of the zila parishad, and, at the block level, the sarpanch of the panchayat samiti.²⁴ The nature of organisational relationship between official and non-official bodies at the panchayat samiti in the execution of the developmental programme may be illustrated by the following example. The agriculture department provides to the panchayat samiti the agricultural extension officer, compost inspectors and other technical staff needed for agricultural extension programme. These are recruited by the agriculture department, are borne on its cadre and deputed to work in panchayat samitis for specified periods. During the period of deputation, however, operational control

²⁰Harvey L. Smith, *op. cit.*, Melville Delton, *op. cit.*, and Alvin W. Gouldner, *op. cit.*

²¹Harvey L. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

²²Grace E. Langley, "Community Development Programme, Republic of India", *Community Development Review*, 1957, No. 6, p. 7.

²³S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-6.

²⁴T.N. Chaturvedi, "Tensions in Panchayati Raj : Relations Between Officials and Non-officials", *The Economic Weekly*, May 30, 1964, p. 921.

over them rests entirely with the samiti to which they are deputed. Their departmental supervisors—district agricultural officers—are concerned primarily with providing technical guidance and other assistance needed by them in carrying out their extension activities.²⁵ Thus, the control over the technical staff of the samiti is exercised by block development officer, president of the panchayat samiti and the district technical officers of the government department.²⁶ This multiplicity of control is shown graphically in Figure given at page 56.

One of the consequences of this multiple system of controls that there are frequent, sometimes *sub-rosa*, conflicting claims over extension officers, between the district technical officers, block development officers and the pradhans of panchayat samitis.²⁷ This has two important consequences. *First*, the district technical officers tend to place secondary importance over the community development programmes and do not tend to be interested in programmes of extension officers. Vepa observes that one of the complications of the multiple control exercised over the technical staff of the samiti by the district technical officers, block development officer and the pradhan of the samiti is that the district technical officers either exercise too close a control over the extension officers and thus undermine the authority of the samiti's pradhan or, what is more frequent, leave the extension officers to themselves who then work without any adequate guidance. Coordination between the samitis and technical departments is, therefore, nominal; and the responsibility for achieving targets tends to be assumed neither by the samiti nor by the technical department.²⁸ Many extension officers also tend to feel insecure under the control of panchayat samiti—a political body—which often tends to judge them not so much by their technical competence or efficiency as by the relationship they can establish with the influential members of the body. Some extension officers are able to establish good relationship with the powerful people in the samiti and use this to short-circuit the authority of the district level officer and the block development officer.²⁹ A *second* consequence is that conflicting instructions are often issued by the block development officer and the pradhan to extension

²⁵V. Nath, "The Technical Departments under Panchayati Raj", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VIII, p. 512.

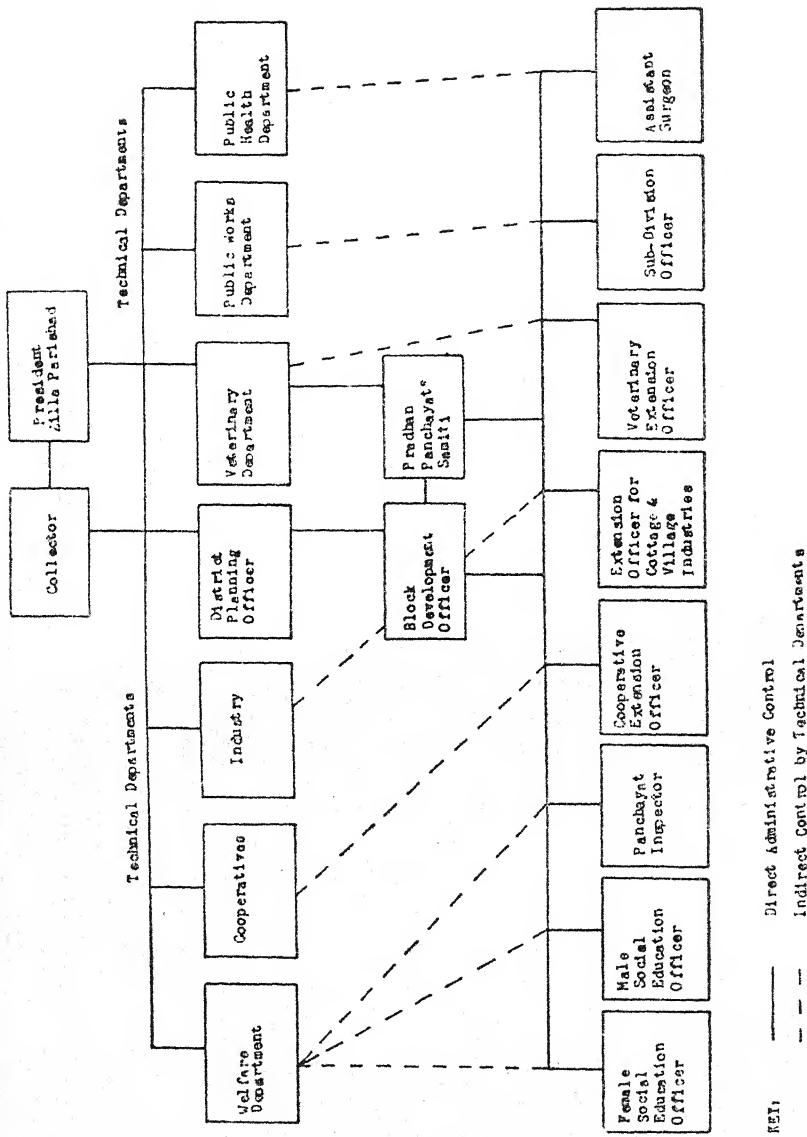
²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 512-3.

²⁷S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67, V. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 517; T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, p. 923; and Ram K. Vepa, "Panchayat Samiti: An Appraisal", *Kurukshetra*, Vol. 9, 1961, pp. 9-12.

²⁸Ram K. Vepa, pp. 9-12.

²⁹V. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTROL OF EXTENSION OFFICERS AT THE DISTRICT AND PANCHAYAT SAMITI LEVELS



officers which affect their job performance.³⁰ Chaturvedi, for example, points out in his study of panchayati raj administration in Rajasthan that difficulties in the relationship between the pradhan and the block development officer tend to arise because of a lack of clear demarcation of their spheres of action. They often pass contradictory instructions to the extension officers. This tends to create factions in the staff which affect seriously the administration.³¹

Supervision of Technical Staff by Generalist and by Non-Technical Administrators

Tension in bureaucratic organisations tends to arise when technical personnel are subordinated to the authority of the generalist administrator.³² The authority of the modern administrator is often based on the position he holds rather than the technical knowledge he commands. Yet he is required to supervise and evaluate the work of technical personnel who may have far superior skills in their specialisation than him. The administrator, therefore, tends to base his evaluation of the technical staff on what they produce rather than how they produce it. This is objected to by the technical staff who very often tend to emphasise the technical procedure involved in their jobs rather than how much they produce.³³ The situation in panchayati raj administration is similar to that described above. The tension generally is observed between the block development officer, a generalist in the block team, and the extension officers, such as the veterinary extension officer, the agricultural extension officer, etc., about whose technical specialisation he knows very little and whose work he must supervise. This leads to resentment which lies in the fact that most block development officers are on deputation from general administration and are not equipped, many a time, with the knowledge and technology of specialities, such as animal husbandry, agriculture, construction, cottage industries, etc., which form an important part of the community development programme. They are nevertheless responsible for sanctioning projects in these fields and evaluating these; and they must also report on the performance of the extension officers.³⁴ The criteria which often seem to govern the sanction of projects by the block development officers are: (1) whether a project meets the

³⁰T.W. Cousins, "Community Development in West Bengal", *Community Development Review*, 1959, No. 3, p. 10; Haridwar Rai, "Co-ordination of Development Programmes at the District Level with Special Reference to the Role of District Officers in Bihar", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 12 (1966), No. 1, pp. 28-59; K. Seshadri, "Co-ordination of Development Programmes at the Block Level", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 12 (1966), No. 1, pp. 60-87; T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, pp. 921-4.

³¹T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, p. 923.

³²Alvin W. Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

³³S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

³⁴K. Seshadri, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

administrative requirements, such as budgeting; (2) whether there is a popular demand for the project in the community; and (3) whether the allocation of money for a particular programme would otherwise be spent within the period of allocation. The extension officers, on the other hand, tend to judge a project primarily on technical criteria, such as whether it is technically sound and whether it is worth the effort in cost/gain terms. Conflict is created when block development officers by their administrative authority tend to impose their judgments on the extension officers.³⁵

Conflicts also tend to arise between the block development officer and his team of subject-matter specialists on the one hand, and the pradhan and the leadership of functional committees of the panchayat samiti on the other hand. In panchayati raj, deliberative and executive powers in regard to developmental programmes have been given to panchayat samitis which work through their functional committees having powers to approve projects involving various amounts of money, technical skills, etc. The criteria used by these committees in making decisions are often not rational; and the decisions tend to be made on political and other parochial considerations. Often these projects are less than technically sound; and sometimes flout the objective of community development programmes of social justice. The block development officer and the extension officers resent these decisions. Further, the block development officer and his team are under the administrative control of the pradhan of the samiti who is a layman in administration as well as in technical matters. This is also highly resented by the samiti staff which creates a conflict between the official and non-official organs of the panchayati raj administration.³⁶

Role Conflict and Organisational Tension in Panchayati Raj Administration

The role conflicts among the personnel of panchayat samiti also seem to be related to what Melvin Seeman calls *status dimension* (conflict between the value of dependence and independence), and *means/ends dimension* (conflict between the emphasis on the process of achievement) of the role of block development officer,³⁷ and to what Parsons and Shils call the *universalistic* (a value orientation towards institutionalised obligation to society) and *particularistic* (a value orientation towards institutionised obligations of friendship, kinship, castes and other primary groups) of the block personnel and the panchayat samiti leadership respectively.³⁸

³⁵S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³⁶V. Nath, *op. cit.*, pp. 512-21; T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, pp. 921-4; and Haridwar Rai, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-59.

³⁷Melvin Seeman, "Role Conflict and Ambivalence in Leadership", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18 (1953), pp. 373-9.

³⁸Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Cambridge, Harvard University (1959), pp. 76-7.

When the community development programme was launched in India, the staff was drawn from the existing government departments to fill the various positions. The assignment of programme responsibilities to the personnel was done on the basis of their status in the parent department. In spite of the new expectations in the community development programme, attitudes and behaviours of these officers, however, continued to be largely of their old department.³⁹

There is a strong tradition in most Indian government agencies, particularly in the Revenue department from which most of the executive officers in the community development administration were recruited, that it is the job of the government officer to govern; and that senior officers should direct, while junior officers should obey. While this might be an appropriate attitude in other areas, it certainly does not suit the philosophy of the community development programme.⁴⁰ Thus, Dube observes that in tasks connected with economic development and community development

the Indian bureaucracy has been hesitant and unsure, and its standards of performance and levels of achievement have not been equal to its reputation. Its structure and ethos suited it more for maintenance of law and order than for massive nation building; its adaptation to the emerging milieu has been beset with organizational incompatibility, psychological resistances and value conflicts. In consequence, it suffers from certain lags and finds itself unable to grapple with the new challenges with ease and confidence.⁴¹

Thus, a highly authoritarian style of block development officers characterised by superior/subordinate relationships to maintain their 'high' status has created several problems in the administration of community development programmes. For one thing, the relationship between block development officers and the extension officers, already strained by the resentment of the latter over their subordination to the former becomes further impaired. The strict superior/subordinate relationship orientation has also created a severe problem of communication, between higher and lower ranks, practically at every level in the community development administration. The communication of information is essentially from higher echelons to lower echelons in the form of directions and instructions. The limited information which flows from lower levels to higher levels goes through a

³⁹S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, p. 68; and C.C. Taylor and D. Ensminger, "Role and Status Relationship in Programmes Administration", *Community Development Review*, Vol. 12 (1963), p. 98.

⁴⁰T.R. Batten, *Training for Community Development*, London, Oxford University, 1962, pp. 6-7, and V. Subramaniam, "Hindu Values and Administrative Behaviour", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 13 (1967), No. 4, pp. 695-701.

⁴¹S.C. Dube, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-51.

censoring process in such a manner that it is practically useless when it reaches finally the top most level.

The conflict in the block development administration also tends to arise when the block development officer emphasises the achievement of community development targets without much regard for means employed to achieve these. This dimension of the conflict seems to be related to what Gouldner has called *cosmopolitan* (orientation characteristically of professionals which displays a high degree of commitment to specialised role skills, professional ethic placing equal emphasis on means and goals, and a strong commitment to technical or professional reference group) and *local* (predisposition which shows a lower degree of commitment to professional skills and ethics and reference groups orientation to the organisation) orientations of the extension officers and the block development officers respectively. The extension officers in the block team fit in the category of cosmopolitans because they are technical persons who possess specialised skills and perform specialised roles. They are, therefore, largely concerned with the professional aspect of the job instead of achieving targets by hook or crook. This is not appreciated by the block development officers who are mainly concerned with achieving targets.⁴²

The role stress in the panchayati raj administration also seems to arise due to the conflict between universalistic or bureaucratic and particularistic orientations of the block personnel and samiti leadership respectively. The universalistic orientation, i.e., impartiality, objectivity and impersonality, etc., is strikingly manifested in bureaucratic organisations.⁴³ The organisation structure of community development programme in India is such that it lends itself to the bureaucratic model of analysis, i.e., each part of the programme is logically related to all other parts, and the role of each cadre of the programme personnel is clearly delineated.⁴⁴ Consequently, the block staff tends to place comparatively a high emphasis on the universalistic considerations in their decision-making. While the panchayat samiti leaders tend to base their decisions largely on political and other particularistic considerations, the members of panchayat samitis are, by and large, socially influential people. Their influence rests upon the support they can get from the people in the area. This generally means that they should prove useful to their supporters by relating themselves to their interests. Consequently, the leaders tend to use their position in the panchayati raj to help their supporters to procure such things as seeds, fertilizers, loans and subsidies, building material, jobs, etc. In other words, they tend to use

⁴²S.N. Dubey, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

⁴³R.K. Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality", in Herman D. Stein and R.A. Cloward (eds.), *Social Perspective on Human Behaviour*, Glencoe, Free Press, 1958, pp. 577-84.

⁴⁴C.C. Taylor and D. Ensminger, *op. cit.*

block agency as a means to achieve their particularistic ends and resource base to nurse and enlarge a body of their supporters.⁴⁵ Block development officers and extension officers, however, work from a different and antagonistic perspective. They tend to emphasise technical, rational and impersonal factors in their decisions. This is often not appreciated by some factions or the other in the panchayati raj leadership and creates conflict between them. Chaturvedi observes that factionalism has vitiated the administrative atmosphere in the panchayati raj.

Whenever an official in the panchayat samiti is found guilty of inefficiency or corruption and any administrative action is taken against him, the non-official with whose group he identifies himself interferes with the process without enquiring into the causes of such action and support their 'man'.⁴⁶

Transfers, appointments and promotions are generally made on the basis of group loyalties. Singh and Ashraf report that in response to the question, "Do you feel that leaders put unfair pressures on government officers and functionaries for furthering their interests?", nearly 75 per cent (n=242) government workers and 57 per cent (n=159) of the panchayati raj leaders believed that the government workers are subjected to unfair pressures by the panchayati raj leaders. The pressure is exercised to obtain grant-in-aid permits, and quotas, and to seek political ends through favouritism; to benefit their 'own people'; to have certain officials transferred or have favoured individuals posted; and to use funds inappropriately, etc.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis deals with the structural factors responsible for the tension in the panchayati raj institutions. The main factors examined are : (i) multiple system of control over the samiti's-staff; (ii) the supervision of technical staff by generalist and lay administrators; and (iii) role conflicts. The analysis suggests several theoretical implications. One, it lends support to the hypothesis advanced by Gouldner that the organisational tension resulting from the supervision of the technical staff by generalist administrators is not peculiarly a phenomenon operating in industrial societies, but is an equally significant structural variable in organisations set up in rural areas for developmental purposes. Second, the multiple system of control over the staff in the organisation tends to set limits upon the

⁴⁵Ram K. Vepa, *op. cit.*, p. 10 ; T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, p. 923; and K. K. Singh and Ali Ashraf, *Bureaucracy Leadership and Development: A Draft Report*, Kanpur, Indian Institute of Technology, 1971, p. 82.

⁴⁶T.N. Chaturvedi, *op. cit.*, p. 923.

⁴⁷K.K. Singh and Ali Ashraf, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

degrees to which integration of personnel can take place. Third, the social and cultural environments contribute considerably to the organisational behaviour of the personnel working in formal organisation.⁴⁸ The particularistic orientation among the non-officials in panchayati raj seems to stem from the pressures exerted on them, by what Gouldner calls "social system imperatives", such as loyalties to political, ethnic, religious, kinship and caste groups. Presthus observes that the pattern of bureaucratic behaviour reflects the values of the institutions of socialisation of the bureaucrats. Nepotism, favouritism, etc., observed in bureaucratic organisations in many under-developed countries are the manifestations of the patterns of family and kinship relations in which personal loyalties outweigh the demands of objectivity and impartiality.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸Fred W. Riggs, "Administration in Developing Countries", *The Theory of Prismatic Society*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1957, pp. 23-110, and Massee Berger, *Bureaucracy and Society in Modern Egypt*, Princeton University, 1957.

⁴⁹Robert V. Presthus, "Behaviour and Bureaucracy in Many Cultures", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 19 (1969), pp. 25-35.

Control, Supervision and Guidance of Panchayati Raj Institutions*

Henry Maddick

IT SIGNIFIES a considerable change in the climate of opinion that this article should bear the title it does. Not so long ago control was looked on as something not only superfluous but actually antagonistic to the whole panchayati raj conception. As one studies earlier conferences both those of the central council for local self-government, of the community development ministry, and of development commissioners, so one gains the impression that those who argued for control were looked on as being traitors to an ideal. Broadly, this was that the purpose of the panchayat was to create local *self* governing communities at the village level. In fact, recreate would be a better word because much of the loose thinking surrounding the subject stemmed from writings in the past which referred to the villages as being small republics, as in fact those in the Delhi area often were forced to be to preserve their own exsistence from the marauders of the late-moghul and post-moghul period. This basically sound description has been overlaid with certain romantic accounts of village life taken from much earlier periods, and it is a combination of these two which led many people to think of panchayats as being entirely independent of any other institutions of government, and this approach has been supported by the phrase Local Self-Government which has been in vogue since the last century.

This attitude appears to have been transferred to the whole of the new panchayati raj system quite oblivious of the change in the scale of functions which the development of a full system of decentralisation implies. What has happened in all States is that most of the development functions have been transferred to the panchayati raj units and what has happened in some of the States, in addition, is that all, or virtually all, of the functions of the district administration and the old district boards, have been devolved upon the new local government units. Under these circumstances, whatever philosophy may be held by those who subscribe sincerely, but, in the opinion

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VIII (1962) No. 3, pp. 500-11.

of the author, misguidedly, to the principle of local units untrammelled by other organs of government, some regard has to be paid to the realities of the situation.

Two considerations have been uppermost in the minds of those concerned with development and with panchayati raj. The first is that unless the panchayati raj units operate with reasonable efficiency and subscribe to programme objects with some enthusiasm the whole development programme is likely to slow up and even, in some areas, totally collapse. Unless these objectives are accepted by the different bodies as their objectives and the means to their attainment put into effect by the various tiers, there can be no programme. The other factor is the vital need of involving the people, the citizens, in democracy as well as in development programmes.

AN INDIFFERENT ATTITUDE

A certain caution has been urged as a result of the experiences of many of the units in the States which were the earliest to espouse panchayati raj. Often the frailties of human nature have been only too evident. The non-officials have frequently used their positions in order to foster their own interests or that of their family, their village, their caste or their business associates. Pradhans have sometimes tried to become the local bosses. There has been acrimony instead of harmony between the officials and non-officials and the old administration itself has not, by any means, been blameless in performing its role in the new situation. The attitude of many officers at district level whether in the technical services or in the revenue branch has been that panchayati raj is not their business,—to use a phrase uttered by them.

Perhaps too, another feature has made itself apparent to those who approached the system in a somewhat too idealistic way. There was considerable support for the theory that the people would recognise the bad representative and at an early opportunity express their opinion, exert social pressures upon him and finally operate the final sanction of defeat at the next election. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Whilst it is the theory of basic grassroots democracy, it requires particular conditions in which to operate—practical institutional devices to enable the people at large to confer, an informed body of electors and at the same time sanctions in the hands of the people to operate between the distantly spaced elections. At the moment despite the provision for the gram sabha in the legislation of every State¹ and the lip service paid to this concept of basic democracy, there is hardly a State in which it will be found to be operating widely. This is not surprising when one considers the difficulties inherent in getting such an organisation to work and the lack of realistic legislation for this purpose. Moreover, in one aspect the people will, for some time to come, be lacking

¹With the exception of Madras and Kerala.

experience, namely, the desirable norms of behaviour of their representatives and of officers and those bodies and without an understanding of these norms it will be difficult indeed to judge individual representatives except in cases of flagrant disregard of the most simple rules of conduct.

It is, therefore, because of the ineffectiveness of this control and because of the total importance of the cumulative operation of all these local bodies to the nation that degrees of control, supervision and guidance have been recommended. They are necessary first, to ensure that the panchayati raj units operate in a way which will establish sound traditions and conventions for themselves thus providing touchstones for the future against which the behaviour of individual units and representatives may be judged. In this, there must be regard for the equity and honesty of decision making and subsequent action, whether by officials or non-officials. This is basically a new concept for many of those who now find themselves in possession of power. The power, the status and the prestige, all these are readily appreciated, but the correlative responsibility to the whole of the community whether or not it has voted for the opposition during the election, is something which is only dimly perceived. Each component part of these units has to realise also the value of the contribution that the other part must make. On the one side, there is the commonsense, the inherited and acquired social understanding of the elected representative and on the other, there is the acquired know-how, the wider experience and often the better education of the more widely informed official. Success depends on their cooperation. But so often individual attitudes and old habits of mind are dominant and the old animosities assert themselves to the detriment of panchayati raj and the nation. Here is a most important field in which the supervision, guidance, education and encouragement has to be given, namely, the general development of the units which, in some cases, means the general development of the system itself.

The other aspect of supervision is that of technical performance in the fulfilment of various programme targets which comprise the whole national programme. Admittedly, these must be adapted locally if they are to have any local significance, but the adaptation will be nothing, if there is not the will to achieve the target, whatever it may be, —agricultural production, extension of medical services, improvement of education, the growth of social services, the extension of communications, and all the other manifold activities which together make up the development programme. This equally requires the goodwill of both non-officials and officials, the partners in the panchayati raj programme. It demands from them understanding of how rich an output can result from the blending of the knowledge of the expert and the understanding of the layman. It requires often an acceptance of unpalatable decisions regarding the raising of taxes to supplement state and union grants, the ordering of activities in priorities which frequently may be unpopular in the short run and the discrimination between areas not merely

in terms of political advantage, but in terms of need, often in terms of investing of the resources of men, material and money which will give the greatest returns to the *community as a whole*. These decisions are the unpalatable concomitants of power, and upon them depends the fulfilment of programmes which are vital for India's future. Without supervision, guidance, education, and encouragement, how can we hope that the decisions of 5,320 major units and 210,000 minor units will achieve this end?

CONSTRUCTIVE CHECK-UP

In the future one may envisage two main types of control and supervision. The first is the basically formal process of inspection and audit. The second is the more recent and much more difficult process of encouragement, education, guidance and supervision.

Inspection and audit will be needed in order to ensure that the basic requirements of the law and of absolutely essential regulations are being satisfied as far as records and the minimum discharge of functions is concerned. Audit will clearly be needed at all levels to ensure that frankly dishonest practices are detected. These are traditional functions and unfortunately tradition has established in them the climate of fault-finding as a basis of operation. This needs to be changed.

The old approach is no longer relevant to the dynamic, constructive purposes of government and administration today. If the panchayati raj units are to achieve their purposes and are to satisfy the needs of the nation, they have to be creative, inventive, even daring, showing on every possible occasion qualities of initiative. Moreover, many of their staff, in fact most of their staff, will be in situations which are strange to them. They will, therefore, be more prone to make mistakes than if they were operating in well-known, well-understood routine situations. If programmes are to have a healthy dynamism, the increased possibility of error must be recognised and allowed for. In other words, mistakes must be treated in an entirely different way from dishonesty. Single mistakes are reasons for educative action, not punishment.²

There is a basically constructive role to be fulfilled by the functions of inspection and audit. The personnel carrying out these activities are in a position to explain, to educate, and to advise.³ If these can be carried out effectively one step forward in the process of helping the system to develop

²This plea for a change of attitude should not under any circumstance be taken as one for the condonation of dishonesty. Far from it, for the accusations of corruption are too widespread within Indian society already. It would be disastrous if panchayati raj were tarred with the same brush. But one of the most effective means of preventing this is the audit mechanism backed by an inevitable surcharge or other punishment of the persons concerned.

³This is, in fact, the practice in several East African countries, in particular Kenya, where the audit section is an effective educator.

along sound lines will have been taken. But it must be remembered that the inspectors and auditors including those at the higher and intermediate levels, who are not in the field, must be oriented to their new role and also to the role of panchayati raj.

Other wider forms of supervision are required to provide guidance for both the technical programmes and the general performance of the local units.

LACK OF COMMUNICATION

The need for technical supervision, education and encouragement is little appreciated even by the technical departments themselves. For too long these departments have deluded themselves into thinking that the issuing of a directive will automatically lead to programme fulfilment, but as many of the most astute realised, this never was and never could have been. Clearly, there is here a failure in the chain of communication from the State Department to the village level and in the reverse direction too.

This problem is to be found in any system and it is only to be expected with the enormous expansion of the technical services in India which has taken place since 1947, and more particularly since 1952 when the community development programme got underway. District officers and extension officers upon whom the programme in the field depends are often ineffective in operation. The inexperienced need a great deal of education on the job before they can change. Those who are unchangeable should be got rid of as rapidly as possible.

There is, however, another complication, already touched on earlier in this article, namely, that in order to obtain fulfilment of a departmental programme, the panchayati raj units must be persuaded both of its importance and value to them and, consequently of, the need to facilitate its execution. This involves those questions of priorities and of local revenue-raising which may be unpalatable to the members. Moreover, some members may try to concentrate a beneficial programme in their own particular sections of the area or of society in which case both the executive officer and the technical officer must do their best to persuade their council to adopt a decision more palatable to the community as a whole. In short, officers in the field are directly involved often for the first time in their lives in a political situation, a situation with which they must learn to live and in which they must learn to cooperate with members in such a way as to persuade the council to adapt wisely the department's programme.

In this new situation many of the officers in the field and particularly the extension officers at panchayat samiti level are bewildered and often frightened people. They require help and support from officers senior in the organisation, officers who can bring to this difficult problem of human relations the experience of longer years in the service, the greater understanding

of the technical essentials of the programme and the greater authority that spring from these and from a senior position in the official hierarchy.

Where an extension officer fails to secure support from the panchayat samiti for the programme or where the programme is being implemented partially or half-heartedly, it is the duty of the district officer to come to his help. Likewise, if the district officer faces the same situation in the zila parishad, he should be able to look to the division or state headquarters for help and assistance. In these respects guidance, education and supervision are vital necessities, both for the officers as to how they can succeed and for the authorities as to where their larger duty lies.

Apart from the actual operation of the council itself, one must also ask whether the extension officers who are the official servants of the samiti are getting adequate *on-the-job* help and encouragement from their district officers. Many of these men have come directly from training schools, colleges or institutes into the front-line of operations. Their experience on the job is negligible. Their understanding of how to handle the public is meagre indeed. It is the heavy responsibility of the district officers to visit the Panchayat samitis for periods which are long enough for them to get out into the field there to show by working examples in job situations what can be done to solve problems.

This may well involve a new attitude towards subordinates based upon the approach that if a man makes a mistake, usually he is anxious to ensure that the mistake will not occur again and wishes to learn how to avoid it in the future. The process of education of assistants junior to oneself cannot be based upon fault-finding, not that as if successful results rather than timid passivity are required for the future.

The other field for the exercise of guidance, supervision, encouragement and education is that of the growth of panchayati raj units in such a way that as units they will establish healthy traditions and conventions of behaviour and promote the efficient and honest partnership between officials and non-officials. In this field emphasis must be placed upon the way in which business is conducted, relations with the public are maintained, the speed with which decisions are taken and then implemented—in short upon the total activity of the local council and its servants and the growth of a healthy institution upon which the future can be based. These needs should not be looked on as separate from that of technical supervision although they may require different people to carry them out. The general approach of the council to its overall responsibilities will affect its attitude with regard to its technical functions. On the other hand, the attitude of those officers who are pressing for technical advance will influence the way in which the council reacts to all situations in which it finds itself.

There are a considerable number of technicalities involved in this apparently general aspect of any supervisory programme. Does the council work efficiently and in particular does it make use of its powers of

delegation to chairman and committees? Is its financial procedure not only in accordance with the general rules but such as to provide guidance in a programme of activities of the various departments? Are the annual and quinquennial plans produced with realism and equity? Does the council concentrate upon broad decisions of policy and patterns of execution rather than with the details of administration? Do officials receive encouragement from the council and in turn do they behave with both honesty and loyalty towards their employing body? These and many other questions must form the basis of evaluation and thus of education. The appreciation of their value and the analysis of whether these values are being served by the panchayati raj units as a whole require skilled supervisors, for whom this is the main responsibility, not something to be worked in along with a host of other jobs.

COLLECTOR AND PANCHAYAT

From whence is this supervision and guidance to come? At present the Acts provide various methods of supervision. Everywhere there is at least nominal supervision of the subordinate units by the next superior tier. Thus panchayats are supposed to be supervised by the panchayat samitis and panchayat samitis in their turn by the zila parishad. On the other hand, the arrangements and methods for achieving this are far from clear.

Of what is this supervision to consist and how is it to be carried through, more particularly who is to carry it through? Most of the Acts provide for the zila parishad to coordinate the plans and supervise the fulfilment of these by their constituent panchayat samitis. In practice this means but little. The approval of plans is often perfunctory. The mechanism for supervising their fulfilment is very difficult to put into operation. The chief executive officer, for example, can do little more than *inspect* the officers of the panchayat samiti and obtain what information he can from various returns made by them. In many cases there will be as many as 15 to 20 blocks in the parishad area, and the task of supervision is almost impossible for one man to fulfil except in a negative inspectorial fashion. There are also the pramukhs who may be encouraged to visit, and who in some cases actually wish to inspect. Supervision will be a difficult task for which only a few are really fitted, and requiring much more time than the normal pramukh can give, except in a State, such as Maharashtra, where they are paid for full time work.

A complicating factor in what is in any case a difficult situation, is the political one. How effective is the supervision of the zila parishad over the panchayat samitis going to be, when the superior body is made upon the chairman of the second tier organisations? There is some likelihood that the Pradhan will resent the appearance of the chief executive officer or of the pramukh in his area unless both these officers can exercise a very considerable

degree of tact and unless their visit is *politically acceptable*. One can envisage such visits and tours of encouragement as lending opportunity for the making of political difficulties. This criticism should not be taken as decrying the role of leadership which an impartial, experienced and tactful pramukh can exercise in the area of the zila parishad, for this could prove immensely effective and helpful, and this aspect of his responsibilities should be brought home to him in every possible way. It is, however, a hit and miss operation; if he is first rate the system will work, if he is not supervision may only arouse antagonisms.

Quite rightly, States have sought to provide further means of carrying out this all important function of education, guidance and encouragement. In most States their imagination has gone no further than putting the burden on the shoulders of the collector. After all he has been in the past the jack-of-all trades and there is no reason why he should not play this role—at least this is how the argument runs. The ways in which the collector is connected with the system vary from those southern States⁴ where he is in fact the chairman of the zila parishad and still very much the chief officer of the district administration, in Maharashtra where he is outside the panchayati raj system altogether with no responsibility for it except in the event of a grave emergency. Within this range there are States where he is an ordinary member of the zila parishad,⁵ another where he is chairman of all committees and yet others where he is outside the system but given responsibilities for overseeing its effective operation and development.

In the circumstances, the decision to use the collector was inevitable. No other officer was available nor was any other system envisaged except in the Punjab where a Directorate of guidance and supervision has been established, to help the panchayati raj units to understand better their responsibilities and ways of discharging them. Given the situation that no separate organisation has been created the other States⁶ which have implemented the panchayati raj legislation were forced to use the revenue organisation.

A number of problems arise from this solution. First whether the collector is not over-worked and, therefore, unable to devote to this new and time-consuming responsibility, the degree of attention which it must have if his supervision is to be education and encouragement and not mere inspection. Is he adequately trained? Has his past experience of senior and superior status within the district fitted him for these very delicate and difficult tasks which must rest on persuasion and tact? Moreover, can his influence be exercised very effectively where the chief executive officer is of a similar rank to himself? Finally the question must be posed as to how long the system will be politically possible? The collector is still viewed

⁴Madras and Mysore.

⁵e.g., Rajasthan.

⁶Perhaps the best example is Uttar Pradesh.

as a government man and in fact most preliminary reports referred to the need for government to have its representative in the area to act as its 'eyes and ears'. It is suggested that within a short number of years as panchayati raj gains strength, this attitude will be politically untenable.

It is then that those who have developed the Punjab approach will start to benefit. In other words, the responsibility for the overall goods of the system requires a high degree of understanding of and sympathy with the aims and objects of Panchayati Raj, of the methods most suited to the efficient operation of the units and of the realities of human relations. All these require that officers shall be specially trained in this task and given experience in the different panchayati raj units before being called upon to supervise them.

The situation in Maharashtra will require watching with considerable care. The aspects of supervision which have been developed in this paper are in fact aspects of *continuing* encouragement, education and guidance and are based upon the proposition that the supervisor for any given number of panchayati raj units will need to be so closely in touch with them that he can anticipate difficulties or alternatively appear quickly to smooth them out before individuals have taken up positions which will involve loss of face if they withdraw. In Maharashtra the position of the collector is that he will only intervene at a time of crisis when there is a threat to maintenance of law and order, or when the government is so concerned that they have instructed him to do so. The success of this system must depend upon the maturity of outlook and approach, the wisdom and experience, of pramukhs and chief executive officers alone for none other can influence the situation there in its daily operation.

Whilst this part has concentrated almost entirely upon the general supervision, much that has been said applies also to the district technical officers and to their divisional counterparts if they exist. There is need for these officers not only to give the support in the field over the practical difficulties which the extension officers experience, but also to give help to them in educating their political masters. Above all this requires two things. Orientation of these individuals—the more professionalised they are the more they require it—as to the aims of panchayati raj and the ways in which the panchayati raj units affect their programmes and the methods by which they and their extension officers can influence decisions of these elected bodies. Secondly, there is needed a reappraisal of the practical work situation which is thus involved. For the majority of these officers their own administrative and technical responsibilities prevent them from giving proper attention to these new duties. There must, therefore, be a reappraisal of what is involved at various levels and the abolition of many activities of only minor importance, or alternatively the delegation of these to competent assistants. There will probably have to be also a reduction in the actual number of subordinate units for which each officer is

responsible. In the majority of cases the supervisory load even now is far too great to be discharged effectively, let alone if the methods emphasised here are to be carried out.

CONCLUSION

There will of course be other and more general methods of influence by government over panchayati raj units. The most important of these is the traditional method through giving or withholding grants, a device which has scarcely been used in India. There is the process of issuing directives to the authority that certain actions or policies shall be executed by them, the appointing of a commissioner to carry through the work, the suspending of individual chairmen or members of the council who behave in a way which is deleterious to the well-being of the council and the panchayat, and ultimately there is suspension of the council itself.

All these are excellent after the fault has been discerned for, except for finance, the rest are to be applied only where an authority has failed. They are relevant to a crisis situation and not to day-to-day help and encouragement. Moreover, they require a proper system of communication which really turns into an adequate system of supervision which will report rapidly the failure of a local authority to carry out its responsibility, and if they are to be effective in a practical sense they will also require the intervention of an officer of adequate seniority first to try to persuade the authority to discharge its responsibility, and secondly, if there has to be a commissioner interregnum, to persuade them to adopt once again the responsibility as their own. In short, somewhere the need for a body of individuals specially trained, well experienced, understanding, and tactful will arise. At the present time provision for these is not being made in India.

The future may bring changes in this situation as the realisation spreads of its importance of guidance, supervision and control for the well-being of the system and the nation. If because of workload or because of his being *persona non grata* to the elected representatives, the collector has to be withdrawn from the system, some other mentor will be required. This may involve the formation of a new all-India service for panchayati raj which would embrace the executive officers and the supervisors. Specially trained and highly experienced, this could prove of great value to the local government system and to the general administration of the country. If this were to be done then the collector's work would become relatively unimportant and his post would be either downgraded or abolished. On the other hand, if the supervision is to be carried out through the collectors, then they should be freed from all the responsibilities and given special training in their new role, which cannot be learned from the process of making mistakes on the job.

Much thought and attention needs giving to this important question

for upon it and upon an adequate, highly-geared training programme, depends the future success or failure of panchayati raj. It could be fatal to assume that democratic control by the masses will be effective for many years to come. It is equally dangerous to assume that everyone—officials and non-officials—know the way the system should be operated and will proceed to work it in this way. Too much is at stake for the nation as a whole to leave the future to vague hopes and unsubstantiated theories. Is enough being done to strengthen this aspect of a basically sound system, to ensure that those who are being charged with working the system receive support, guidance and help at critical times? Unless a strict system of administrative, legal and judicial controls is to be instituted, which could cripple the development of resilient local units, a system of education and supervision, with but occasionally control, must be evolved. States have evolved their own methods but the Union Government may have to make proposals for something more satisfactory than are most of the present arrangements.



The Collector and Panchayati Raj institutions*

H.C. Pande

NEW ELEMENTS and environment, calling for the reappraisal and realignment of the roles of different individuals and agencies and their mutual relationship, have been introduced in the district development administration with the advent of the panchayati raj. Although the local boards, existed even before the introduction of panchayati raj, they were only minor organs within the framework of the district administration, with responsibilities of only limited nature and subordinate in many ways to the authority of the district magistrate/collector and other officers. On the other hand, panchayati raj institutions of today are increasingly regarded as units of local self-government of a compendious character with responsibilities which subsume the entire substance of local planning and development.

POSITION OF THE COLLECTOR

In most of the States, there has come into being an inter-connected structure of democratic statutory bodies linked, in many cases, organically with each other. The network of administrative and technical services at the block level has been brought under the authority of the elected institutions. The emergence of these institutions has brought the politically elected members of these bodies in intimate contact with the services in the district of which the collector has been the traditional head. Though the Balwantray Mehta Committee had recommended that the collector should function as the chairman of the district level body, a different view gradually began to emerge which was opposed to the retention of the collector in any dominant position in the panchayati raj set-up which, it was felt, would not to be in consonance with the spirit of decentralisation. It was argued that the collector would, due to his eminent position, status and prestige in the district, curb the efflorescence of the democratic spirit. Accordingly the Rajasthan panchayati raj legislation, which was first in the field, adopted a via media and made the collector an associate member of the zila parishad without any right to vote or hold office, whilst in Andhra Pradesh collector was made the chairman of the standing committees. Meanwhile the Maharashtra committee on democratic decentralisation

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XI (1965) No. 4, pp. 637.

noted that "the Collector had hardly been able to supervise or guide the existing local bodies in respect of which he has considerable responsibility and authority". The committee added that the appointment of collector as chief administrator of the district level body would make the position of former extremely difficult if there was a difference of opinion between the government and the zila parishad, and recommended that the collector should be kept out. In an attempt to reconcile these conflicting views the third five year plan stressed that "the Collector of the District will continue to have a large share of responsibility in facilitating the success of panchayati raj institutions". It was also recognised that the collector

has the duty of ensuring of coordination at the district level between the zila parishad and the technical officers in different fields, close contacts between the latter and the panchayat samitis and extension officers at the block level, and a continuing flow of technical advice and guidance from departments at the State level.

It was emphasised that

an important aspect of the Collector's work will be to assist the democratic institutions and the public services in developing the right conventions in day-to-day work and in administrative relationship based on recognition of their distinctive contribution in fulfilling common objectives.

A perusal of the State legislations relating to panchayati raj would show that the collector, in view of his special position, has been given a distinctive role in the scheme of the panchayati raj. Apart from that, the Collector has been made, following the recommendation of the working group on inter-departmental and institutional coordination for agricultural production, the chairman of the agricultural production committee of the zila parishad in six States, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore, the Punjab and Rajasthan. The position of the collector in relation to panchayati raj institutions varies from State to State. Broadly speaking, there have emerged four patterns of the role of collector vis-a-vis zila parishads. Some States, feeling that the zila parishad needed the expert guidance of the collector, who, with all his experience and authority could, as Chairman, give necessary fillip to the entire programme and promote the coordinated effort of the official and non-official agencies, have made him a member and chairman of the zila parishad. Taking a radically opposite view and arguing that the collector "burdened with the multiplicity of functions and with physical limitations of time and energy" would be unable to do justice to the work of zila parishad, certain State Governments have kept him out of the zila parishad completely. Taking a middle

view, a number of States have felt that though the collector need not be made the chairman of the zila parishad, it would still be advantageous to keep him within the panchayati raj system, as he would always be in a position to make effective contribution in the deliberations of the zila parishad. Accordingly, in certain States, collector has been made a member of the zila Parishad and chairman of the standing committees which are vested with considerable power and authority. Whilst in some other States, the collector is a member of the zila parishad without any right to vote or hold office. (The exact position in different States is given at the end.) More recently, the committee on panchayati raj appointed by the Government of Himachal Pradesh, considering the role of collector vis-a-vis zila parishad, thought that there were certain obvious advantages in having collector's association with the zila parishad, as the significant position of the collector should be utilized to the best possible advantage of securing the integrated and coordinated development of rural areas. The committee felt that the collector should be required to exercise some regulatory and controlling powers in respect of various panchayati raj institutions and be allowed to retain the powers which he exercised in respect of local bodies to meet an emergent situation. The present pattern of relationship between the collector and panchayati raj institutions can be conveniently studied under four heads, *viz.*

- (i) control over the staff of the panchayati raj institutions;
- (ii) powers to suspend the resolutions of panchayati raj bodies;
- (iii) powers to remove office-bearers; and
- (iv) powers to suspend and dissolve the panchayati raj bodies themselves.

It may be advantageous to consider these items *ad seriatim*:

Control Over Staff

With the transfer of a large staff to the panchayati raj institutions at various levels of seniority and responsibility, it is necessary to evolve the channels of control and procedures for enquiry against the officers and staff of these bodies in the event of their dereliction of their duties and also for enquiry against the individual members of the panchayati raj bodies when they misuse their discretionary or statutory powers. It may be mentioned that panchayat samitis and zila parishads have two categories of staff at their disposal. Firstly, they have the chief executive officers and various extension officers whose services are placed at their disposal by the parent departments and, secondly, they have the members of the panchayat samitis and zila parishad service itself. The control and procedures for enquiry would necessarily be different in case of these two categories of staff. The question of control, in the present context, would relate only to the executive officers, as

the control over the staff of panchayati raj bodies is generally exercised by their chief executive officers or by the appropriate heads of the departments from which they are on deputation.

The disciplinary control over the executive officers of the panchayati raj bodies might take the form of: (1) the writing of the confidential report, which, if adverse, may affect the executive officer, in various ways, and (2) the authority to inflict various punishments. Various patterns exist regarding the writing of the confidential reports of the executive officers of the panchayati raj bodies. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh the confidential report is initiated by the president of the panchayat samiti or the secretary of the zila parishad and the collector countersigns it, while in case of Madras, the collector writes the confidential report on the basis of the comments received from revenue divisional officer and chairman of panchayat union council. In the case of Orissa, the chairman of the panchayat samiti records his remarks on the work of the block development officer, in a form approved by the government and sends it to the collector and the collector himself records his remarks in a separate form and the report of the chairman is attached in original to this form along with the comments of the collector. The comments of the district level officers, sub-divisional officers and executive officers are also incorporated in the confidential report of the block development officer. In Rajasthan and Punjab, the confidential reports are initiated by the collectors and sent to the development commissioner for counter signature whereas in the case of Rajasthan, the comments of the pradhan are also obtained by the collector and attached to the confidential report of the block development officer.

As to the authority which has the power to inflict minor punishments on the executive officers of the panchayat samitis, in the case of Andhra Pradesh, it is the collector whereas in Assam, Mysore, Orissa and Rajasthan these powers are with the State Government. The powers are exercised by the revenue divisional officer in Madras, the divisional commissioner in Maharashtra (in the case of the zila parishad) by the panchayat samiti itself in Punjab, the commissioner for agricultural production and rural development in Uttar Pradesh and the development commissioner in Himachal Pradesh. There is no uniformity in this system either.

The disciplinary control over the executive officers of the zila parishad also takes the form of the authority of recording the confidential report, or inflicting minor punishments and, of administrative control by chairman to a limited extent. In Andhra Pradesh the chariman of the zila parishad writes the confidential report of executive officer and sends it through the collector to the government. In Orissa, the confidential report is written by the chairman and forwarded to the collector who prepares his own report in a separate form and sends the report along with the report of the chairman in original to the government. In Punjab, the report is written by the chairman and sent to the government. In Rajasthan, the district development

officer (collector) writes the report of the chief executive officer of the zila parishad and sends it along with the comments of the pramukh to the government. In Uttar Pradesh, the confidential report is written by the State Government. There is, therefore, a wide variation in the authorities writing the confidential reports of the executive officers of the zila parishad.

Powers to Suspend the Resolutions of Panchayati Raj Bodies

The powers to suspend the resolutions of a panchayat vest in the Commissioner in Andhra Pradesh and in the Collector in Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Maharashtra, Mysore, Punjab and Assam. In Punjab and Assam, these powers are concurrently exercised by the sub-divisional officers as well. These powers have been exclusively given to the sub-divisional officer in Bihar and Orissa, while they are exercised by the zila parishad in Uttar Pradesh, by the officer in charge of panchayats in Rajasthan, the director of panchayats in Kerala and taluk development board in Gujarat.

The powers to suspend the resolutions of the panchayat samiti are with the State Government in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal and Rajasthan. The powers are also exercised by the collector (deputy commissioner or district magistrate) in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mysore, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. In Assam the powers of the collector are concurrent with those of the sub-divisional officers.

The powers to suspend a resolution of the zila parishad vest in the State Government in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and West Bengal. They have been given to the collector (deputy commissioner or district magistrate in Assam) in Assam (concurrently with sub-divisional officer) and in Maharashtra. They vest in the commissioner in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. No provision exists in Rajasthan, Madras, Kerala and Mysore.

It is thus clear that there is a general trend towards granting the powers of suspending a resolution of panchayat or panchayat samiti to the collector whereas the powers to suspend a resolution of the zila parishad are generally given to the commissioner or the State Governments.

Powers to Remove Office-bearers of Panchayati Raj Bodies

There is a provision for the removal of office bearers of the panchayati raj bodies in all the States. In case of panchayats these powers are vested in the State Governments in Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan (for Sarpanch and Upasarpanch only). These powers are exercised by the commissioner in Andhra Pradesh, by the collector in Mysore and Rajasthan (for panchas only), by the sub-divisional officer in Uttar Pradesh, by the director of panchayats in Punjab, by the panchayat itself in Madras and by the zila parishad in Maharashtra.

At the panchayat samiti level the powers of removal of the office bearers have been vested in the State Governments in Andhra Pradesh,

Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh. They are with the commissioner in U.P., with the panchayat union council in Madras and with the 'competent authority' in Gujarat. No provision exists in Kerala.

The powers to remove the office bearers of a zila parishad have been vested in the State Governments in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, U.P., West Bengal, and Himachal Pradesh. They are exercised by the 'competent authority' in Gujarat. No provision exists regarding the removal of the office bearers of a zila parishad in Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore, Rajasthan and Madras.

From the foregoing it will be seen that in the matter of the removal of office bearers of the panchayati raj bodies the general tendency is towards giving these powers to the State Governments. This is a very desirable provision in the panchayati raj legislations of different States and should remain unchanged in the case of panchayat samitis and zila parishads. It may, however, be considered whether it is desirable that even the powers of the removal of the office bearers of the panchayats should be given to the State Government because the number of panchayats is very large and the State Government may be unnecessarily burdened by this task. The recent annual conference on community development and panchayati raj has recommended that "the power of removal of members of panchayats should vest in the collector. The collector should also exercise that authority in respect of sarpanch or members of panchayat samitis. The powers to remove the head of the panchayat samiti and members of the zila parishad should vest in the commissioner board of revenue. The powers to remove the chairman of the zila parishad should vest in the State Government. Appeals against the orders of authorities below the State level should lie to the next higher authority".

Powers to Suspend and Dissolve the Panchayati Raj Bodies

We now come to the powers of suspension and dissolution of the panchayati raj bodies themselves. The decision to suspend a panchayati raj body has to be taken after great deliberation and serious thought. It is, therefore, natural that these powers should be vested at as high a level as possible. In the case of the panchayats the powers to suspend or dissolve vest in the State Governments in Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh (for dissolution only) and in the deputy commissioner in Orissa.

In the case of a panchayat samiti, the State Government has the powers to dissolve it in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Maharashtra, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh (concurrently with the commissioner), West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh.

The powers to dissolve a zila parishad vest in the State Government, in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madras, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa,

Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. No provision exists for the dissolution of a zila parishad in Assam, Gujarat, Mysore, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala.

The consensus of opinion regarding the vesting of the powers of the solution on suspension of the panchayati raj bodies is that they should remain with the State Governments. The dissolution of a panchayat samiti or zila parishad is a major decision and it may be considered whether this power should be vested in the State Governments in all the States. As regards Panchayats, it might be possible to give such powers to the zila parishad.

MUTUAL REGARD BETWEEN OFFICIAL AND NON-OFFICIAL

Apart from the statutory supervision and control exercised by the collector over the panchayati raj institutions, the problem of mutual adjustments and harmonious relations remains. No amount of statutory control can provide the harmony that is necessary between the Collector as the representative of the government on the one hand and panchayati raj bodies as the popular representative institution on the other, to make the massive plan effort a success. The development of harmonious relationship between the normal administration and the new democratic institutions has been watched with considerable interest over the last 5 years. Prior to the introduction of panchayat raj, there were considerable misgivings about this relationship. Broadly speaking, the collectors have by now developed, by and large, a feeling of loyalty to these institutions. The non-officials have acquired more balanced outlook and a greater degree of tolerance than before and have tried to learn the intricacies of administrative pattern showing a willingness to abide by the rules and regulations and to work within the framework of legislation enacted for them. In cases of maladjustment, the officials are apt to complain that representatives of panchayati raj bodies, brought into office as a result of the support of certain groups, show a tendency to act in furtherance of the interests of these groups and, therefore, do not exhibit impartiality when decisions affecting the interest of these groups are taken by the panchayati raj bodies. The non-officials, on the other hand, tend to feel that officials are generally not attuned to popular aspirations and shy away from tendering whole-hearted assistance to panchayati raj bodies. A recent study on "The Pattern of Rural Development in Rajasthan" has noted with satisfaction that

the Collectors displayed considerable tact and understanding in dealing with matters relating to the working of the Zila Parishad. There was mutual regard and respect for each other in their dealings. The Pramukhs generally conducted themselves with dignity and poise.

Ensuring harmonious relationship between the non-officials and officials which would be absolutely free from rancour is a difficult and slow process,

as a certain amount of friction is inevitable when persons with different background ideas and thinking come into constant touch with each other. It is also to be realised that it would not be possible to improve this relationship merely by framing rules and regulations, as a delimitation of duties and functions of the non-officials and officials would not result automatically in a harmonious synthesis between the thinking of these two limbs. The problem cannot be summed up any better than in the following words of the late Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru,

Officials should bring the experience of training and disciplined services. The non-officials should represent and bring that popular urge and enthusiasm which gives life to the movement. Both have to think and act in a dynamic way and develop initiative. The official has to develop the qualities of popular leader, the people's representatives have to develop discipline and training of the officials, so that they approximate to each other and both should be guided by the ideal of disciplined service in a common cause.

On the whole, a synthesis of official expertise and popular enthusiasm is gradually emerging which would successfully meet the challenge arising out of the democratisation and decentralisation of administration.

Annexure**POSITION OF COLLECTOR IN ZILA PARISHAD**

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Andhra Pradesh .. | .. The collector is member of the zila parishad and chairman of its standing committees. Entitled to participate in meetings of samitis and their standing committees. |
| 2. Assam .. | .. A member of the mohkuma parishad. |
| 3. Bihar .. | .. (i) Entitled to attend and participate in meetings of samitis and parishads and their standing committees, but cannot vote.
(ii) Exercises disciplinary control over all government servants working under the parishad and the samitis. |
| 4. Gujarat .. | .. Associate member of zila parishad, without any right to vote. |
| 5. Madras .. | .. Member and chairman of the district development council. |
| 6. Madhya Pradesh .. | .. Outside the zila parishad. |
| 7. Maharashtra .. | .. Outside the zila parishad. |
| 8. Mysore .. | .. (i) Is the president of the district development council.
(ii) According to the new Bills, he will be outside the zila parishad. However, an officer of collector's status is proposed to be posted as chief executive officer. |
| 9. Orissa .. | .. Is a member with no right to vote. Can attend and participate in meetings of Samitis and standing committees. He is the chairman of administrative coordination committee of the parishad. |

10. Punjab .. Is a member of the zila parishad, without right to vote. (S.D.O. is a member of the panchayat samiti without right to vote).
11. Rajasthan .. Is a member of the zila parishad with no right to vote.
12. Uttar Pradesh .. (i) Is not a member of the zila parishad. May attend meetings of the parishad, without right to vote.
(ii) May send communication to the zila parishad for being read at its meetings and for discussion.
13. West Bengal .. Outside the zila parishad.
14. Himachal Pradesh .. Chairman.

Administration and Politics in the Context of Panchayati Raj*

S.N. Puranik

AMONG THE various subjects of research in the field of public administration, the relationship between administration and politics has received a good deal of attention of the scholars in the recent past. The trend is visible particularly since the experiment of democratic decentralisation or panchayati raj has been tried and vigorously carried out in many states in India. Panchayati raj institutions, whether under the *Rajasthan model* or the *Maharashtra model*, decisively brought administration, representing the policy implementing function and politics, representing the policy formulating function closer to each other in an unprecedented scale and showed, to use Strauss's remark that, "The administration is not a self-contained and self-regulating mechanism but an instrument for the furtherance of specific social interests, and therefore, intimately, concerned with the world at large and its problems".¹ Panchayati Raj institutions are now a decade old and it is possible, on the basis of the experience accumulated so far, to point out the implications of the relationship between administration and politics, or in other words, of the relationship between officials and non-officials, on the overall functioning of the local self-government administrative machinery in the rural areas.

THE CHANGED CONTEXT

Administration, in a democratic and sovereign state like India, has to remain responsible to the people working through their democratic or representative institutions. In the beginning, popular institutions were confined only to the state and national levels although certain advisory bodies or committees were established at the district and taluka levels. These latter bodies were virtually devoid of powers and hence, the

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XX, 1974, No. 1, pp. 108-17.

¹E. Strauss, *The Ruling Class*, London, George Allen & Unwin. 1961, p. 45.

administrative machinery below the state level worked in *relative isolation* of the powerful popular elements at the local level, although it worked all the while for local development. The administrative machinery was more 'structure-oriented' rather than 'situation-oriented'. Democratic decentralisation created 'popular and representative' institutions at different levels below that of the State and the then existing community development machinery in the rural areas was placed at their service.

This was indeed a great advance from the democratic point of view as the bodies which were created were more representative in size and character and also were given more real powers than were given to their predecessors under the community development set-up. It has long been recognised, that most of public policy emerges out of a continuous interaction between the two key processes of politics and administration and secondly, that the successful implementation of the policy depends on how far the political side observes certain restraints in giving free hand to the administrative side. The new set-up of democratic decentralisation was to affect both these processes. Fears were expressed that the result would be nothing but deterioration in administrative efficiency and standards.

This relationship became the main concern of the planners as it was to affect all other, major and minor, administrative activities *within the system*. The administrative side consisted of officials—subordinates and superiors—drawn from different development departments and the popular or political side consisted of the non-officials elected directly or indirectly by the people to form taluka panchayat samitis and zila parishads. Panchayati raj, thus, *rationalised* the relationship between administration and politics all over the country by creating additional democratic layers parallel to the then existing administrative layers below the state level, although there was still large scope left for further rationalisation. It was because of the inter-dependence of politics and administration and also because of the role of human beings in both the fields that the problem of relationship became of central importance.

Involved therein was also the matter of autonomy of both the sides. The necessity of an effective administration and a coherent political mobilisation demanded the maintenance of the autonomy of both the sides and harmonising their relations with one another in such a way that would not harm the system.² The problem of 'political interference' of the relations between secretaries and ministers had already come to the fore at central and state levels. The relations between deputy ministers and permanent secretaries were frequently strained because the former were often young politicians and were never given the opportunity to understand that as political neophytes they would need the help and guidance of the senior officials

²S. Kothari, and R. Roy, *Relations Between Politicians and Administrators at the District Level*, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Administration and the Centre of Applied Politics, 1969, p. 16.

in acquiring a grasp of the intricacies of administration.³ The same was likely to happen at the lower levels, i.e., in the panchayati raj bodies and fears were expressed that the autonomy of each side—particularly of the administrative side—would be violated by the other.

All the fears were in the beginning natural because both the sides had very little in common between them except perhaps their nationality which was Indian. Otherwise, they differed in their educational and intellectual level, administrative experience, etc. While the administrative side lacked in vigour and initiative, the political side lacked in education and administrative experience. If one was procedural, steady, impersonal, coercive, educated and urbanised, the other was impatient, eager, partisan, persuasive, ignorant and illiterate.⁴

It was indeed a challenge to the administration since the panchayati raj altogether changed the very context or the environment in which it worked previously. Firstly, administration was made subordinate to the newly formulated democratic bodies by devolving certain important deliberative and financial powers upon the latter which meant an erosion in the powers previously enjoyed by the administration. Secondly, it was now necessary for the administrative side to tone down its voice so as to get along well with its new unequal partner in the task of goal achievement. The officials were faced with increasing challenge from the political leaders who aspired to decide basic questions confronting the policy and agreed to assign only an instrumental role to administrators. This was essentially a struggle for power.⁵

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

The present author has had an opportunity to study the relationship between officials and non-officials in the taluka panchayat samiti at Aurangabad in Maharashtra in the year 1967. The panchayati raj then had six years of existence in the State of Maharashtra and still the study revealed many important matters which then had a bearing on the general functioning of administration and which have also importance in the present context.

The official side consisted of three layers, namely, the block development officer (or BDO) who was a 'generalist' and a coordinating officer and who was also made an *ex officio* secretary to the taluka panchayat samiti, the extension officers (EO) who were subject matter 'specialists' drawn from different development departments and placed under the administrative (and not the *technical*) control of the BDO, and the village level

³A. Chanda, *Indian Administration*, (2nd Edn.), London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967, p. 101.

⁴Z.U. Khan, "Panchayati Raj and Democracy", in *Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy* (ed.), M.V. Mathur and Iqbal Narain, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, New York, 1969, p. 271.

⁵Kothari and Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

workers (VLW) who were the line functionaries actually working in the villages and who were often described as 'friend, philosopher and guide' for the villagers.

Extension officers in the panchayat samiti under study showed wide difference in their approaches and outlooks as well as in their length of service in the parent departments. Compared to the VLWs, they were better conscious of their status and position. The VLWs were rather too young (80 per cent of them were found below thirty years of age) too fresh in the field (70 per cent were found having less than five years of experience in the field) and too poorly educated (87 per cent of them were matriculates only) to cope with the increased volume of work under the new set-up of the panchayati raj. Being of this variety, the VLWs had very often to yield to the local bosses and to the increasing political pressures.

The non-official side or political side exhibited a unique complexion. The members differed from one another in their educational background, in their length of association with the village institutions like panchayats, cooperatives, etc., in their age groups and caste-groups, in their economic conditions, etc., and all but one had the membership of the same political party, the Congress. Twentyfive per cent of them had linkages with the district level politicians and 15 per cent had linkages with even the state level politicians. This overwhelmingly one party complexion of the panchayat samiti, it was found, helped in bringing the administrative side relatively closer to the non-official side, as there was no possibility of the official side getting itself involved in the group or factional politics of the non-official side. However, this absence of factional feuds among the non-officials did not always make the relationship between the two wings cordial and harmonious.

The two official functionaries, EOs and VLWs carried different convictions about the capabilities and competence of their non-official partners and also about the tendency of non-officials to interfere in the matter of policy implementation. It was found that these different convictions were mainly because of the *degree* of their association with the non-official leaders and not because of their differences in educational and administrative background. The EOs had few chances to mix with the non-officials and therefore, they could not get rid of their prejudices about the capabilities of the non-official leaders. It was interesting to find that 75 per cent of the EOs preferred to travel with their official colleagues rather than with any non-official leader, even though they knew that the association of non-official leaders would facilitate their own work. They were afraid first, of losing their 'neutral' image in the eyes of the people at large and also in the eyes of their superiors and subordinates and secondly, of the possibility of the political labels being attached to them if they travelled with the non-official leaders. This was in spite of their knowledge that all the non-official leaders

in the panchayat samiti belonged to one political party only. These fears or prejudices about the non-officials kept EOs 'psychologically' away from the non-official side. The VLWs often worked at the field level and had several points of contact with the non-official side. It was because of the frequent contacts with the non-official leaders that the VLWs got more opportunities to think of the non-officials *objectively*:

Further, the threats, verbal or physical, given by the non-official side to the official side, spoke of the lack of cooperation or the absence of harmonious relationship between the two sides. It was found that the VLWs more than the BDO and the EOs, had to encounter this phenomenon very often. The VLWs' failure to adopt an extension approach and their tendency to have loose talk with the non-official leaders were the main factors, as were pointed out by the BDO and the EOs, behind the threat phenomenon. It was only in case of such as had close contact with the non-official and not of all, that the instances of verbal and physical threats from the non-official side came to the notice of their superiors. Hence, the smooth working of the administrative side depended on the very cautious behaviour and approach of each and every official while working with the non-officials in the field.

The system of supervision under the new set-up was the most important controversial point over which there was great resentment among the officials. It was indeed a new experiment in public administration as the technical officers or the extension advisers were put under dual control, i.e., under the technical control of their own parent department and under the administrative or operational control of the BDO. This was intended to keep up the level of advance in all branches of rural life at a uniform level.⁶ However, the importance given to the non-official side as well as the close and regular contacts of the officials with the non-official leaders in day-to-day administration brought in one more non-official and non-technical authority to supervise the administrative performance.

No official layer was found satisfied with this phenomenon of the technical side being supervised by 'the non-technical staff like non-officials'. The principle of 'unity of command' was often violated as the EOs (sometimes) and the VLWs (always) were often subject to the supervision by several persons—officials as well as non-officials. Fifty per cent of the EOs carried the conviction that their subordinates like VLWs, agricultural assistants, primary school teachers, etc., were very often inclined towards towing the line of the 'non-official bosses' than towards the official superiors. The dual or rather multiple supervision and control had an adverse effect on the working of the administration.

Interviews with the non-official side also revealed important matters

⁶N. Prasad, "Panchayati Raj—Problems of Reorganization", in M.V. Mathur and Iqbal Narain, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 443.

having direct bearing upon the problem of relationship in particular and upon the problem of administrative efficiency in general. Firstly, few learned members criticised the practice of various departments of sending or deputing inefficient or otherwise unwanted persons to work in panchayat samitis. They were in favour of the creation of an independent and permanent cadre manned by real experts and placing it under the direct charge of the zila parishad. This was necessary for creating a 'team spirit' among the officials themselves as, it was expected, they would then no longer possess different departmental outlooks and loyalties. Officials would then develop some affinity towards the panchayat raj bodies and this would bring them still closer to the democratic or political side.

Secondly, it was found that the non-officials did not like the participation of officials in local politics. Eighty per cent of the non-official leaders had a very low opinion about most of the VLWs and most of the primary school teachers who often took part in the local factional politics. These leaders had a sense of respect for the BDO and the EO who refrained from involving themselves in any type of politics in the taluka. This had a definite effect on their behaviour with the VLWs as well as with the EO and the BDO. It was found that the VLWs were not consulted on any specific issue by the villagers and instead the tendency among the village leaders was to consult the officials at the higher levels. The VLW was no longer looked upon as 'guide and philosopher' but at best only as a 'friend'. Thus, the direct involvement of officials in politics or even such a doubt in the minds of the village leaders had an adverse effect on the 'image' of the official concerned which consequently marred his efficiency in the field.

The non-officials expressed their dissatisfaction over two other important matters, namely, first, the target-minded nature of most of the officials and their tendency to submit reports based on false information and secondly the phenomenon of red-tapism. Thus, it was mainly on four counts that the non-officials expressed their resentment due to which they had developed some psychological distance from the administrative side.

Lastly, it was found that the relationship at the village level was more personal and intimate but also was one-sided as the VLWs were the outsiders poorly recruited, far less mature and had often to rely on the village leaders to sell their services. Thus, by force of circumstances, the VLWs dared not assert their own will and had to depend on the village leaders. The picture was quite different at the samiti or taluka level. Various complexes—inferiority and superiority—and prejudices about each other played their role in maintaining some psychological distance between the two wings at those levels. However, the 'Great Experiment' definitely brought the two wings closer to each other and succeeded in bringing about an *attitudinal* change in them. It made the officials more democratic and people-oriented in their outlook and the non-official leaders more appreciative of the administrative difficulties of the officials.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The point has been made earlier that the introduction of panchayati raj rationalised the democratic administrative structure in our country by creating democratic layers parallel to the administrative layers below the level of the State. These democratic bodies at the taluka and district levels are in most cases in the hands of the ruling political party at the State level. Naturally, the non-official leaders in these bodies have close linkage with the State level ministers and this linkage sometimes, though not always, puts the officials like the chief executive officer at the zila parishad level or the BDO at the taluka level in a most precarious position. "It is well known that even district collectors find it difficult to resist the pressure brought on them by the members of the state legislatures. It is no wonder that the executive officers of local bodies who in the majority of cases belong to a lower cadre of administrative service succumb to the elected Chairman".⁷ Sometimes the linkages are so strong that the BDO cannot take any disciplinary action against the erring panchayats. For instance, the BDO, who also acts as a block panchayat officer in Punjab and in this capacity inspects the village panchayats, is empowered to take disciplinary action when any abuses are brought to his attention. "Some of the Sarpanchas and Panchas whose work he may inspect, and adversely comment upon, are members of the panchayat samiti and in that capacity they may like to create embarrassments (even harassments) for the BDO and the social education officer in order to settle some old scores."⁸

The present author, while working as an investigator in a pilot study on the educational administration in zila parishads in Maharashtra two years back, found that such linkages of the village leaders with the zila parishad president, with the chairman of different subject-matter committees of the zila parishad, and in some cases even with the MLAs, the MPs and the state level ministers very often put the officials in a difficult situation, particularly in the matter of teachers' transfers.

These linkages are sought both by the state level politicians and the local level leaders. "The state level politicians are keen on building up 'influence zones' in rural areas, recognizing that panchayati raj institutions would serve as vote banks in the future."⁹ According to Iqbal Narain, in Rajasthan panchayati raj institutions were growingly becoming important as vote-

⁷M. Venkatarangaiya and M. Pattabhiram (ed.), *Local Government in India*, Allied Publishers, Bombay, New York, 1969, p. 58.

⁸B.S. Khanna, "Some Empirical Observations in the Punjab Context", in M.V. Mathur and Iqbal Narain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 346.

⁹*Report on the Working of Panchayati Raj in the Jaipur District* (Mimeographed) Panchayati Raj Research Unit, Department of Economics and Public Administration, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 1963, pp. 136-46, quoted in the footnote by Mathur and Narain (ed.), 'Introduction', *Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. xxi.

banks both in regard to state and national elections.¹⁰ Pointing out that the problem of political interference is not new, Aiyar hypotheses that the effects of political interference seem to increase as one moves down the structure of governmental arrangement. He further comments, "It is in the districts that one observes the most unlovely features of this new ecology of Indian administration. The strained relations between the officials and the elected members in panchayati raj are now a common feature of district administration all over the country."¹¹ This tendency of 'interfering through political linkage' seems to be a major factor which affects the administrative autonomy adversely and also hurts the feelings of the officials.

Further, the political composition of the democratic body also affects the administrative side in more than one important way. The author, while working as an instructor in a panchayati raj training centre in a predominantly tribal district of Maharashtra, was told by one of the non-official member-trainees who happened to attend a training course in the centre, the following incident. It happened in his own taluka panchayat samiti which was dominated by the Communist Party members when the Sino-Indian border conflict erupted into war in the year 1962. The State government had taken a few communist party workers into custody under the Preventive Detention Act. The taluka panchayat samiti concerned passed a resolution paying no heed to the advice tendered to it by the BDO, that all the *detenues* should be released by the State government. The failure of the BDO in dissuading the panchayat samiti from passing such a resolution invited the wrath of the State government and ultimately the BDO was transferred to another place. Thus, it is clear that the situational factors often affect the behaviour of the officers and hence, their performance.

As the political nature of the democratic bodies, thus, very often violates the autonomy of administrative side and harms administrative efficiency, the development-oriented character of these bodies also works in the same direction. All the official functionaries under the panchayati raj set-up have seen a tremendous increase not only in the volume of work that they used to do before but even in the type of work they are now supposed to carry out. Legitimacy of their own subject is not strictly adhered to in actual practice and the officer has very often to perform a number of other duties which are strictly not his. For instance, the primary school teachers are supposed to look after host of other activities related to the small savings drive, family planning programmes, seed distribution, census, adult education, etc., so much so that their original duties in the school suffer. The same is true of the extension officers also who are now supposed

¹⁰I. Narain, "The Emerging Concept", in Mathur Narain (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 32.

¹¹S. P. Aiyar, "Political Context of Indian Administration", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XVII, No. 3, July-September, 1971, pp. 341-42.

to look after the multifacet development of the block. The EO (education) or the EO (agriculture) has to inspect, in addition to his original duties, the village panchayats also and thus has to perform the role of the EO (panchayat) even though the latter functionary also is working in the block. This has affected these technical or extension functionaries in two important ways. Firstly, they have developed a feeling that their identity has been lost. Secondly, they have experienced an excessive increase in their 'span of control' due to which they are unable to cope with their supervisory and controlling functions in time and efficiently. The present author has observed this phenomenon in the study of the taluka panchayat samiti referred to earlier and also at the time of studying the educational administration in the zila parishads in Maharashtra. A few of the primary schools in every taluka often remain uninspected during the year and, wherever such inspection is carried out, it is too formal and superficial to serve any useful purpose. Thus, the political or power character of the democratic bodies violates the autonomy of the administrative side as a whole, whereas the development character of these bodies violates the legitimate or original field of the individual officer and mars his efficiency. This factor is related to the problem of relationship also, as the officials have very often to decide on the priority to be given to any specific activity to be undertaken at a particular time and in this process have very often to hurt the feelings of persuading or pressurising non-official leaders.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The empirical study of a taluka panchayat samiti presented in the beginning of this article showed that the relationship between officials and non-officials is really *central* to all other administrative problems like supervision, control, coordination, administrative improvement, etc. It also showed that the cordial relationship between these two functionaries is important for the satisfactory performance of the basic functions of the system. Involved in the problem of this relationship is not only different types of persons and their attitudes and prejudices but also, first, certain structural matters like the system of drawing different personnel from different outside development departments and again putting them under multiple control and secondly, non-structural matters or administrative tendencies like much concern for the rules and regulations, target oriented mentality of the officials, etc. Situational factors like the political linkages of the non-official leaders, the political complexion of democratic bodies, etc., impinge upon the legitimate field of the administrator and thus violate the autonomy of the administrative side. The developmental character of these democratic bodies has worked towards violating the legitimate or original field of the individual administrator. This has also adversely affected the overall tone of the administration. □

Political Parties and Panchayati Raj*

Myron Weiner

IT IS widely believed in India that political parties ought not to participate in elections for village panchayats. A recent session of the All-India Congress Committee reaffirmed the willingness of the Congress Party not to participate in such elections and again called upon other political parties to similarly restrain themselves. In spite of these resolutions, however, any observer of the local political scene in India must know that in fact the district and taluka party organisations of Congress, and of other parties as well, have been participating in village elections. There are of course many areas in which only one party is of any local importance, and therefore the party does remain aloof from local elections. And there are also many situations where villagers have refused to ally themselves with political parties and either fought elections on non-party lines or have had no contest at all. But such situations as these are dwindling, and local policalitical parties have increasingly become involved in village politics. The leaderships of the national parties are quite aware of these developments, and the resolutions which have been passed and the frequent speeches on the subject by the Prime Minister, the community development minister, and others, is a recognition of this increased intrusion of the parties into local politics.

It is not the purpose of this article to express any preferences with respect to the argument that parties ought to remove themselves from village elections, but rather to explain why it is that in spite of the efforts of national leaders, party politics has grown at the village level. We are concerned here, therefore, with conditions, not preferences. Those who are concerned with policy in this area, however, might explore these conditions before expressing their preferences, for they may find, as we shall suggest here, that the conditions of local government are such that it is virtually inevitable that political parties do enter the local scene on an even more active scale than they have thus far.

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VIII, 1962, No. 4, pp. 623-28.

LOCAL PARTIES AND VILLAGE POLITICS

The tiered structure of panchayati raj virtually forces the local parties to enter village politics. In most States (there are, however, some exceptions such as Maharashtra) the panchayat samitis and zila parishads (sometimes one, sometimes both) are elected by the village panchayats or are made up of presidents of the village panchayats. Since both the samitis and parishads have considerable financial powers and control over much of the government's local developmental activities, they are an object of party interest. Local units of parties in India, as in other democratic countries, build themselves upon local services and therefore they invariably seek control over any governmental unit with large patronage powers. There are of course those who believe that parties ought to confine their efforts to those areas of government where broad policy is made. But contrary to such hopes, political practitioners and local citizens are very much concerned with where a school is built, who gets a well, where a road is constructed, and whose son finds a job. "Who gets what" is a crucial question in any political system, democratic or authoritarian, and whatever institution has the power to decide in invariably a target for those who want political power.

Since political parties want to control the samitis and parishads, and since these bodies are generally elected by the panchayats, it follows that political parties must exercise influence within the panchayats. Parties do not necessarily put up their own candidates in panchayat elections, at least not on any formal basis, but they are eager that their supporters gain control. Sometimes they will urge their supporters in the village to stand and sometimes, after the election, they will approach those who were elected and try to persuade them to join their political party.

POLITICS OF POWER

The power of village panchayats is considerable under the new legislation in some States, and the very reasons which interest parties in gaining control of samitis and parishads lead them to enter the panchayats. So long as the panchayats had little power, there was little reason for political parties to have much interest in them, but once their powers were increased, parties were inevitably drawn to them. Those who argue that local bodies should be given more power, but that at the same time there should be no politics amidst them—Involving either political parties, castes, or factions—are taking a contradictory position. Wherever there is power, there must be politics,—a law as fundamental in political science as supply and demand is in economics.

In India, as in other democratic countries, political parties have built themselves on a local government base. Long before the Labour Party in Great Britain assumed national power, it had won power in many municipalities. In India too, the success of Subhash Bose and C.R. Das in

strengthening the national movement in Calcutta by gaining control of the municipal corporation is well known. Similarly, the Justice Party in South India established itself by winning control of district local boards. And in recent years, both the D.M.K. and Jan Sangh have tried to gain control of local bodies, both municipalities and village panchayats, in their quest for state and national power.

Local politicians are well aware of the importance of these local bodies. The president of the panchayat has considerable influence in the village, even with respect to how a substantial part of the village will vote in assembly and parliamentary elections. It does of course happen that a village panchayat president is of one party and the village votes for another party in the general elections; but it is even more common that the panchayat president can sway a substantial part of the village. In a recent study of a constituency in Andhra by this writer, it was discovered that virtually every village carried by the Swantantra assembly candidate or which gave the Swatantra candidate a large vote had a panchayat president who supported him. This constituency may, of course, have been idiosyncratic, but conversations with local politicians in other constituencies support the impression that the panchayat president can be an influential if not decisive voice in how the village votes in general elections.

Thus, even if the local politicians chose to deny themselves the patronage made available to those who control local bodies, they must try to win the support of those who control these bodies in the general elections. Again, they may try to win the support of the panchayat president for their party's assembly or parliamentary candidate, but it is far safer to elect as president of the panchayat a man who is already known to be a party supporter.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND VILLAGE FACTION

Village leaders find it advantageous to be associated with a political party. One often finds a village in which one group, usually a prosperous landowning section of a dominant caste, has firm control of the village and can get its candidates elected unanimously to the panchayat. But one also finds many villages, perhaps the vast majority, where there are internal conflicts. It makes little difference for the purpose of our analysis here as to what the reasons for these conflicts are. One caste may oppose another. Two families may be in conflict, each with their own factional support. A group of low-caste tenants may oppose a group of landowners. Ambition, status, traditional loyalties, historic feuds, or struggle for control over land may be the bases of these conflicts. The point, however, is that where a village is divided, both groups may ally themselves to a political party in the district. They may lend their support in the general elections, for by doing so the party candidate in return may give them the money to help them organise and strengthen their village faction. The village faction

may also feel that if their man gets elected to the assembly, then villagers who belong to neither faction are more likely to give them support. Moreover, the assembly or parliamentary candidate they have supported may be of some help to them in panchayat elections. He may give them money, or his open support may in and of itself be an asset.

It is thus a mistake to think that villagers are constantly being 'exploited' by political parties. It is no less true that village factions 'exploit' political parties. At the local level there is often much bargaining between the village factions and the party candidates for the assembly. The village faction may press for a well, a road, a school, a telegraph office, or electric power connection. Moreover, there are many problems of individual villagers, involving permits and licences, excise taxes, cement and fertilisers or credit, where the villager must turn to the local administration, to the co-operative society and to the local MLA. The villager is often perfectly prepared to give his political support to some party or candidate in return for having some influence, and once a connection is established between the villager and a local member of the legislative assembly it can hardly be severed for purposes of village panchayat elections. But who is to say that in this mutual arrangement one is getting a better bargain than the other?

VILLAGE POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

Many national leaders have suggested that present efforts by political parties to abstain from panchayat elections can in fact succeed if the party leaders will only carry out the promises they have made. But if the analysis here is correct, then goodwill alone on the part of national and even state party leaders is not sufficient, for the conditions of local political life in most villages are such that local politicians cannot abstain from village politics without ceasing to be politicians.

Let us turn then to examine the consequences of party intrusion into village politics. Does it, as some suggest, introduce a new level of conflict into rural India? And does the presence of party politics make it impossible to achieve the ideal of a village consensus?

Firstly, it is necessary to say that a comparison of villages in which parties participate with those where party politics is absent is meaningless since the conditions which led to the rise of parties in one and not in the other make the villages fundamentally different. As we have already suggested, where a village is unified, it may simply mean that a single group of men have firm control over the village. One must take care not to confuse this form of 'unity' with a genuine consensus arising out of the bargaining and adjustment of competing groups. Such a confusion is made in a recent report on panchayati raj by the ministry of community development and cooperation which said that "an election which is not contested because of

complete unity of the geographical community is a most happy situation".

Secondly, when a village is torn by party conflict, a closer examination generally shows that the conflict pre-dates the existence of political parties within the village. Conflicting castes, factions, kin groups, or rival leaders often affiliate themselves to political parties. The name of the party may be added, but the substance of politics is often the same. In Andhra villages, for example, Kammars and Reddis often ally themselves to different political parties; similarly in Gujarat, Patidars may be with one party and Baraiyas with another. The political party is simply a vehicle for their conflict, not the cause. It is doubtful that the withdrawal of parties from the villages, assuming for the moment that it were politically feasible, would reduce conflict.

Nonetheless, there is probably much truth in the belief that village conflicts have increased in recent years. But is this because political parties have injected new forms of conflict into the villages or rather because universal adult suffrage has been established (thereby giving opportunities to the economically weak but numerically large communities), the powers of local bodies increased (thereby making their control a worthy object of local conflict), and in most areas the powers of zamindars, jagirdars and other large estate-holders have been broken by land reform legislation (thereby freeing the village from a kind of imposed political unity)?

There is no evidence, therefore, that parties have brought about village disunity, or that parties are responsible for the intensification of caste and factional conflicts. There are in fact some people who argue that the intrusion of parties into village elections may at least inject some larger issues and ideas into village life, and that parties, in their effort to win support, will cut across caste and religious lines. In short, it is argued that party conflict would be a more desirable form of conflict than that involving traditional loyalties. Though a theoretically strong argument, there is little evidence thus far that such a development has taken place. Unfortunately there is very little field data to examine any of these arguments since most field inquiries are more concerned with the administrative than political aspects of the functioning of panchayats.

CONCLUSION

Those who believe that political parties should somehow withdraw from village life are apparently convinced that the conflict of competing groups cannot lead to good government, and that a unified society is better able to provide good government. There is little historic or theoretical justification for this position. Moreover, on a practical level—and no policy can be successful if it fails to take the real world into account—there is in India the inescapable fact of rural conflict. Moreover, the effect of land reform legislation, the increase in literacy, the growing powers of local

government, the establishment of universal adult suffrage, and many other kinds of local, social and economic changes are likely to result in an intensification of conflict rather than its diminution. From a practical viewpoint, the question is not how to eliminate conflict, but rather how to manage and channelise it?

If as we have argued in this paper it is unrealistic to attempt to eliminate parties from village panchayat elections and from other local government bodies, then there is little point in the present efforts by national parties to pass resolutions calling upon their own local party units to stay out of village panchayats. Indeed, the more relevant question should be: What steps can national and state units of political parties take to improve the performance of their local party units participating in village politics? In short, the issue seems to be not how to get the parties out of the panchayats, but rather how to get the parties to provide good government at the local level.

Since the national parties in principle insist that they want their local units to stay out of panchayat elections, they are not in fact giving any attention to how to improve the performance of their local party units in village panchayats. Such an effort might prove to be more realistic, and therefore more rewarding, for those who want to see an improvement in local government in India. □

Personnel Administration Under Panchayati Raj*

**THE ORGANISATION AND WORKING OF THE
RAJASTHAN PANCHAYAT SAMITIS AND ZILA
PARISHADS SERVICE SELECTION COMMISSION
1959-1970**

Ravindra Sharma

ONE OF the greatest weaknesses of local government structures all over the world has been the chronic inability of the individual local government institutions to recruit adequately qualified personnel.¹ In India also, the institutions of urban as well as rural local self-governments have regularly faced this problem and various institutional mechanisms of personnel administration have been employed to handle the recruitment function such as short-term deputation of government servants, creation of state-wide cadres and centralised selection of employees of local self-government institutions.²

While the Balwantray Mehta Study Team did not make any concrete proposals for personnel administration under panchayati raj, the Government of Rajasthan opted for partial institutionalisation of the recruitment function by appointing a separate commission, called the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service selection commission (RPSZPSSC), charged with the duty of making selections for a specified range of posts. Of course, the bulk of the staff working in various panchayati raj institutions in Rajasthan are on deputation from the government but Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads Act, 1959 made a specific reference for constitution of a separate cadre called panchayati raj service³ and encadred

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XX, 1974, No. 1, pp. 127-46.

¹*Local Government Personnel System*, United Nations, New York, 1968.

²M.V. Mathur, Iqbal Narain and V.M. Sinha, *Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: A Case Study of Jaipur District*, 1966; and R. Argal, *Municipal Government of India*.

³At the time of creation of Panchayati Raj Services, the following posts were encadred in which certain changes were introduced later on: (i) gram sewak, (ii) gram sewika, (iii) primary school teacher, (iv) fieldmen, (v) stockmen, (vi) stock assistant, (vii) veterinary compounder, (viii) poultry demonstrator, (ix) sheep and wool inspector, (x) dresser, (xi) vaccinator, (xii) upper division clerk, (xiii) lower division clerk, (xiv) driver, (xv) projector block, (xvi) mate (industries). *Vide Rule 4 of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Service Rules, 1959.*

a number of posts in it.⁴

The Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service selection commission thus operates as a key agency for recruitment of panchayati raj personnel encadred in the panchayati raj service and its role is analogous, in a way to the union public service commission and the Rajasthan public service commission although the scope of its operation is limited only to the posts encadred in the panchayati raj service and the other panchayati raj personnel continue to be recruited by other agencies at different levels.

In this article, an attempt has been made to present a case study of the organisation and working of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service selection commission. The article has been written on the basis of: (a) the study of the reports,⁵ acts, gazettes, books and journals; (b) interviews, both formal and informal, with the panchayati raj personnel, the secretary of the commission, employees of the commission, and members of the commission; and (c) field observations. Earlier, a study of the organisation of this commission was made by P.D. Sharma in 1964, based on the formal rules and procedures.⁶ But that study did not provide sufficient data about the operational aspect of the commission. In this paper, an attempt has been made to supplement the study of the formal framework with operational data regarding the working of the commission.

THE STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE COMMISSION

The commission consists of three members,⁷ out of whom two are appointed by the State Government who are called permanent members, possessing the prescribed qualifications, of whom at least one is an officer

⁴According to the fifth report submitted to the government in 1970 on the working of the commission following posts are encadred in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads services created in 1959 under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1959: (i) gram sewak, (ii) primary school teachers, (iii) veterinary compounders, (iv) poultry demonstrator, (v) stockmen, (vi) vaccinator, (vii) dresser, (viii) upper division clerk, (ix) lower division clerk, (x) driver, (xi) mates, (xii) group panchayat secretary, and (xiii) gram sewika.

⁵By the end of 1970, five reports had been submitted to the government on the working of the commission. The first report was submitted in 1964 covering the period from the beginning to December 31, 1963; second for the period from January 1, 1964 to December 31, 1965; third report for the period January 1, 1966 to December 31, 1967, fourth was from January 1, 1968 to March 31, 1969 and the fifth for the period from April 1, 1969 to March 31, 1970.

⁶P.D. Sharma, "Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Service Selection Commission", *Political Science Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1964, pp. 128-134.

⁷Vide Section 86 of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959.

of government, whether retired or in active government service.⁸ The zila pramukh of the district, for which selection is made, serves as the third member of the commission. One of the permanent members is nominated by the government as chairman of the Commission.⁹

Chairman

Under sub-section 7 of Section 86 of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, the State Government can nominate one of the permanent members as chairman of the selection commission. It is at the discretion of the State Government either to nominate an official permanent member or a non-official permanent member as Chairman.¹⁰ An official member was nominated chairman of the commission till January 8, 1967, and a non-official permanent member thereafter. The details of the successive appointments to the office of the chairmanship of the commission are summarised in Table 1. Mohan Lal Vasvaney was the first non-official permanent member to become Chairman on January 9, 1967 when he was appointed for a term of 3 years, and was reappointed in 1970 as chairman of the commission.

According to the rules, the chairman shall hold office for a term not exceeding three years from the date on which he joins his office or until he attains the age of 60 years, whichever is earlier.¹¹ The minimum age required for the appointment to the commission as chairman, is 50 years.¹²

Under the rules, if the chairman is not a government servant (whether retired or in active government service) he draws a salary of Rs. 2,000 per month.¹³ If the Chairman is in active government service, he draws his substantive pay plus a special pay of Rs. 250 per month. If the chairman is a retired government servant, or retired after appointment as chairman, he draws a pay of Rs. 1,000 per month in addition to his pension including

⁸An official of the State Government, retired or in active government service, can be appointed as permanent member of the commission if he is of the rank not lower than that of a collector or a head of department of the State Government drawing a substantive pay of not less than Rs. 850 per month. A person other than a State Government servant (whether retired or in active government service) can be appointed as member of the commission if he is at least a graduate, a person of status and known for his integrity, vide Section 86 of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Government of Rajasthan, *Handbook on Panchayati Raj*, Vol. II, 1959.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Under the original rules, this amount was Rs. 1,200 per month, but this was raised to Rs. 2,000 by introducing an amendment in the rules which was made effective from January 9, 1967. *Vide*, the order No. S.F. 23(2)/Appoints/60, Appointment (A-5) Department, Government of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

TABLE 1 DETAILS REGARDING CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMISSION

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of joining the Commission</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1.	Hetudan Ujwal	14.11.1959 to 13.11.1960	retired IAS
2.	C. Jacob	For 3 years from 11.2.1961 worked up to 10.2.1964	RHJS
3.	Surya Swaroop Mathur	1.5.1964 to 13.1.1966	IAS
4.	Vimal Chandra Mukerji	13.1.1966 to 15.10.1966	IAS
5.	Sharaf Ali Ahamadi	5.11.1966 to 9.1.1967	IAS
6.	Mohan Lal Vasvaney	from 9.1.1967	Non-official (B.A., LL.B)

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

such portion of the pay as may have been commuted. Here the pension includes pensionary equivalent of death-cum-retirement gratuity.¹⁴

The chairman holds an important position in the commission. For all practical purposes, he is the head of the commission and provides leadership in its working. Coordination of all the activities of the commission is one of this important functions. Since he heads the institution, he has been made the appellate authority for all disciplinary cases regarding the staff of the commission.¹⁵

Member

Besides the chairman, there is one full-time member of the commission.¹⁶ He helps the chairman to coordinate the activities of the commission. The member can hold the office for a term of three years or till he attains the age of 60 years, whichever is earlier.¹⁷

If the chairman is on leave or on the occurrence for any reason of a vacancy in the office of the chairman, the member may be appointed as chairman by the government.¹⁸ The member so appointed performs the duties of the chairman.

¹⁴Government of Rajasthan, *Handbook on Panchayati Raj*, Vol. II, 1959, p. 34.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

If the member is in active government service, he draws Rs. 150 per month in addition to his grade pay.¹⁹ If he is a retired government servant, he draws Rs. 850 per month in addition to this pension (pension includes pensionary equivalent of death-cum-retirement-gratuity) including such portion of it as may have been commuted. If he is not a government servant (whether retired or in active government service), he draws a fixed salary of Rs. 1,000 per month.²⁰

In accordance with the rules, the government has appointed 4 persons to serve as the members of the commission so far as per details given in Table 2. It will be seen from Table 2, that up to 1967 non-officials were appointed as members. Thereafter the member has been chosen from government servants. The average duration of a person remaining as a member of the commission comes to nearly two and a half years.

TABLE 2 DETAILS REGARDING MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of appointment/joining the commission</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1.	Ismail Ali	From 22.3.1960 to 21.3.1963 Reappointed from 22.3.1963 for 3 years but served up to 31.12.1963.	B.A., LL.B. (non-official)
2.	Mohan Lal Vasvane	Appointed from 26.12.1964 for one year. His term of service was extended for 2 years from 26.12.1965. But served as Member up to 23.2.1967.	B.A., LL.B. (non-official)
3.	Rajeshwar Das Khanna	From 24.2.1967 to 2.9.1968	IAS, B.A., LL.B
4.	Parma Nand Sharma	From 21.9.1968 to 31.3.1970 and onwards	RAS, (retired)

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

Thus it appears that during the formative phase of the commission, the government adopted the policy of appointing an official as the chairman while the permanent member was a non-official. This policy continued up to 1967 when an IAS official was appointed as member and a non-official

¹⁹ *Vide Handbook on Panchayati Raj, op. cit.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

was appointed as chairman. This pattern of a non-official chairman and an official member continues to the present day.

Staff of the Commission

The staff of the commission consists of the secretary, ministerial staff and class IV employees. The strength of the staff is determined by the State Government from time to time.

Secretary

The secretary of the commission is appointed by the government from among persons encadred in a state service. It is a gazetted post.

From October 10, 1969, the commission has been having a secretary from the selection grade of Rajasthan administrative service. Earlier, the commission used to have some one from senior scale of Rajasthan administrative cadre. The secretary provides general administrative assistance to the commission so that the commission can function effectively and efficiently. The secretary helps in coordinating the activities of the commission.

Besides, the secretary is responsible for looking after certain aspects of personnel administration. He is authorised to impose penalties on ministerial staff of the commission as prescribed in the Rajasthan Government Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1958. Class IV servants are appointed by him. The relevant information regarding the secretaries of the commission is given in Table 3.

Ministerial Establishment

Under the rules, appointments to the ministerial non-gazetted posts are made by the secretary to the Commission subject to the approval of the chairman. In the first instance, the following non-gazetted staff and class IV employees were sanctioned by the government:²¹

1. Office Superintendent	1	Grade I
2. Stenographers		2 Grade II for the Chairman and Grade III for the Member
3. Upper Division Clerks	3	
Accounts Clerk	1	
Lower Division Clerks	8	
4. Class IV servants	9	2 Orderlies for Chairman 2 Orderlies for Members 1 Orderly for Secretary 1 Cycle Sawar 2 Office Peons

²¹The Third Report on the Working of the Commission, 1966-67, p. 2.

TABLE 3 DETAILS REGARDING SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Cadre</i>	<i>Period of serving in the Commission</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
1.	B.K. Binjoo	RAS Senior scale	From 19.12.1959 to 14.6.1961	Transferred thereafter
2.	S.L. Mathur	RAS Senior scale	From 15.6.1961 to 14.11.1962	Retired thereafter
3.	Abdul Ghaffar	RAS Senior scale	From 15.11.1962 to 23.12.1962	Transferred thereafter
4.	Mandhata Singh	RAS Senior scale	From 24.12.1962 to 31.12.1963	Resigned and joined politics there- after
5.	Rang Dutt Sharma	RAS Senior scale	From 1.1.1964 to 15.10.1965	Transferred thereafter
6.	Ugam Raj Lodha	Karyalya Adhikshak	From 1.1.1964 to 30.4.1964 (The period dur- ing which Rang Dutta Sharma remained on leave)	
7.	Paras Mal Bhansali	Karayavahak Adhikshak	From 16.10.1965 to 21.2.1966	
8.	Shubh Karan Kaviraj	RAS Senior scale	From 22.2.1966 to 10.10.1969 From 30.10.1968 S. K. Kaviraj was sanctioned Selection Grade and he was appointed on the same post.	Transferred as Revenue Appl. authority, at Bikaner
9.	Jagdish Narain Mathur	RAS Selection Grade	From 10.10.1969 onwards	

SOURCE : The Reports on the Working of the Commission.

One post of class IV employee was, however, retrenched subsequently on account of the 22 per cent general cut. As a result, only one peon was left for the office. The commission asked the government for the creation

of the following additional posts:²²

1. Assistant Secretary	1 Gazetted
2. Upper Division Clerks	9
3. Lower Division Clerks	9 including 4 typists
4. Class IV employees	5
5. Machine man	1

The Government agreed to sanction only the following posts:

1. Upper Division Clerks	5 (3 permanent and 2 temporary)
2. Lower Division Clerks	4 (2 permanent and 2 temporary)

The government was again requested to sanction the remaining posts. This request was, however, not acceded to.

FUNCTIONS AND OPERATIONS OF THE COMMISSION

As the apex organisation for the recruitment of panchayati raj personnel, the commission is mainly responsible for the following functions:²³

- (i) recruitment, selection and recommendation for posting;
- (ii) extension of the temporary appointments exceeding one year;
- (iii) inter-district transfers; and
- (iv) other functions.

Recruitment, Selection and Certification for Posting

The commission recruits, and selects people for categories enlisted in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads services.²⁴ The commission also certifies the posting of such persons. Rule 8 of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service rules, 1959, requires each panchayat samiti or zila parishad to determine and intimate to the commission at the commencement of every year the number of vacancies anticipated under each category in the following year.²⁵ However, the commission did not receive this information. Consequently, circulars were issued to all panchayat samitis and zila parishads instructing them to send the requisitions.²⁶ However, it was discovered that correct information on this aspect was not being supplied, if supplied at all.²⁷

On the receipt of requisition the vacancies are announced by the

²²The Third Report on the Working of the Commission, 1966-67.

²³Vide *Handbook on Panchayati Raj*, Government of Rajasthan, Vol. II, 1959 and the Reports on the Working of the Commission.

²⁴The Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, p. 59.

²⁵The First Report on the Working of the Commission, 1963, pp. 4-5.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

commission in the government gazette. The commission also writes to the department of public relations to get the posts advertised in any two newspapers of the State having large circulation. When there is a sizable demand, the commission directs the public relations department to publish the advertisement in newspapers which have circulation in districts and zones of those district having a large number of vacancies. Letters to the zila parishads and panchayat samitis are also sent instructing them to publicise the vacancies. On receipt of such a circular, the panchayat samitis and zila parishads comply with the instructions contained therein and also inform the temporary employees working on the posts in order to enable them to apply for permanent posts. Mostly the advertisements appear in Hindi newspapers with relatively wider circulation in the State and in the Government gazette. Considering the posts for which the commission has to make selection, it can be said that the circulation of the advertisement is adequate. However, the advertisements fail to attract the right type of persons because in the advertisements no mention is made of future prospects of the posts, their scale, promotion opportunities, etc.

Interviews

According to the procedure laid down for direct recruitment for the categories enlisted in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service, the applications, received are scrutinised and then candidates are called for interview. The selections are made districtwise. The pramukh of the district concerned is an *ex officio* member of the commission for purposes of recruitment for posts vacant in his district.

The commission conducts interviews for preparing a merit list of the candidates at each district headquarter. For administrative convenience, both the permanent members of the commission have more or less equally divided the districts of Rajasthan between themselves, and undertake visits to these districts for making selections. Therefore, the commission functions as a selection committee at the district level consisting of the pramukh of the district and one of the two permanent members of the commission.²⁸

The administrative staff of the commission revealed that the duration of the interview of each candidate is about five minutes. In an informal interview with forty-five gram sewaks serving in Jaipur district, thirty-eight gram sewaks reported to the author that they had tried to influence the commission by political and social pressures to get themselves selected.

²⁸Under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, pp. 59-60, the Chairman, full time member and the pramukh were required to complete the selection commission. Considering practical aspects an amendment was introduced so that the selections made by one of the full time members of the commission and pramukh of the district, sitting together, are deemed to have been made by the commission, *vide* Rajasthan Gazette, Extraordinary : Part IV-A, dated April 5, 1961.

According to them, the interviews were a mere formality and the candidates were chosen before hand. Seven other gram sewaks, however, felt that the selections were made on the basis of merit. Field survey impressions unmistakably reveal that the interviews are conducted only to complete a formality and that members have ample opportunity to show favouritism while making selections.

In every advertisement issued by the commission reservation of 12.50 per cent for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was specifically mentioned, but as the required number of applicants possessing the prescribed qualifications was not available in a number of districts, the selection was below the reserved quota.²⁹

Table 4 shows that the commission made selections for nearly all the posts in first two years of its working. Teachers, gram sewaks, drivers and lower division clerks were selected, by and large, each year. Because of financial cut in 1963, the posts of gram sewikas were abolished. The commission made selection of gram sewikas again in 1968 since the government had again created some of these posts. The total number of selections made by the commission varies from year to year. It is worth noting here that the commission made no selection for sheep and wool supervisors, poultry demonstrators, fieldmen junior, fieldmen senior and mates (industries) after 1961 because the posts of compost inspectors and fieldmen were abolished in 1963 and panchayat samitis and zila parishads had also not made requisitions for such posts.

In spite of the absence of legal provisions in the beginning, the commission received requisitions from the director of training, panchayat and development department, Rajasthan, Jaipur, for the post of village level workers and from the director of primary and secondary education, Rajasthan, Bikaner, for recruitment of teachers for training of basic S.T.C. for panchayat samitis (Table 5). In 1968, at a meeting of the higher level officials of the development department, Government of Rajasthan, it was realised that the service rules had not made any provision for the government sending requisitions to the commission. At the same time it was deemed necessary that in order to facilitate pre-entry training of the gram sewaks and of the teachers, government's control over their recruitment and selection was a 'must'. Therefore, an amendment was made in rule 15 of the service rules on July 5, 1968.³⁰ By this amendment, the government also acquired the power to make requisitions to the Selection Commission.

Extension of Temporary Appointments

According to Rule 23(5) of the Rajasthan panchayats and zila parishads service rules, 1959, a temporary appointment made by the panchayat samitis

²⁹Vide the Reports on the Working of the Commission.

³⁰Vide Gazette notification dated July 5, 1968.

TABLE 4 DETAILS OF POSTS AND SELECTION MADE

Sl. No.	Posts	1960		1961		1962		1963		1964-65		1966		1967		1968	
		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
1. Drivers		73	46	46	3	39	14	183	35	222	65	235	32	140	25		
2. Vaccinators		511	253	22	10	33	4	57	22					411	23		
3. Dressers														35	4		
4. Sheep and Wool Supervisors																	
5. Poultry Demonstrators																	
6. Veterinary Compounders																	
7. Stockmen and Stock Assistants																	
8. Project Operators																	
9. Fieldmen Junior																	
10. Fieldmen Senior																	
11. Mates (Industries)																	
12. Lady Village Level Workers (Gram Sewikas)		30	12	128	70	193	108									62	5
13. Lower Division Clerks		1132	589	503	146	627	170	2465	264	3276	439	6753	101	---	---	6753	101

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

1 = Number of applications received.

2 = Number of candidates selected.

TABLE 5 SELECTION OF GRAM-SEWAKS AND TEACHERS

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Posts</i>	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964-65	1966-67	1968	1969
1. Gram Sewak (VLW)	470 171	5856 1383	4308 420	5845 832	2713 381	2829 331	2570 140	4083 106	
2. Teachers	3234 1156	10349 7455	13731 5311	13031 3748	19457 6586	24741 5390	7514 868	6898 857	

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

1.1.1 Number of applications received

1=Number of applications received
2=Number of candidates selected.

TABLE 6 EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Total number of extension cases	246	210	276	323	93	71	210	111	47	54

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

or zila parishads should not be continued for a period exceeding 12 months without prior concurrence of the commission. The commission issued necessary instructions in this behalf to all the panchayat samitis and prescribed a performa for furnishing the required information to the commission. Table 6 shows the number of cases in which extensions were granted each year.

The Table 6 shows that the cases of extension of temporary appointments were many in early 1960s. The highest number of such cases was 323 in 1963 whereas the lowest was 47 in 1968.

In spite of repeated directions to the vikas adhikaris by the district establishment committee and the commission to avoid delays in obtaining prior permission for the extension of temporary persons in various cases, extensions were sought after abnormal delays.³¹

Inter-district Transfers

Under Section 86(9) of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, the commission was authorised to recommend inter-district transfers of members of the panchayat samitis and zila parishads service.³² Therefore, the commission issued circular letter no. 2050-2307, dated April 8, 1960, to all the Vikas adhikaris, panchayat samitis, and secretaries of zila parishads, prescribing the procedure and the form in which such transfer applications were to be sent to the commission. These applications for transfer were mostly from those members of the service, who wanted to be posted to their home districts. The number of transfers recommended by the commission are given in Table 7.

TABLE 7 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING TRANSFERS

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Total number of cases	149	231	196	644	258	180	68	98	171	68

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

³¹Vide reports on the Working of the Commission.

³²According to the first report on the Working of the Commission, there had been cases in which the heads of departments directly issued transfer and posting orders in respect of the posts encadred in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service. This act on the part of the heads of the departments was *ultra vires*. Hence it required clarification and the development department at the instance of the commission issued circular letter no. 36/(9)PD/ADM/53/CIR/10335, dated June 5, 1963 directing the heads of the departments not to issue such orders directly in future.

The Table 7 shows that the highest number of cases of the recommendations of inter-district transfers was 644 in 1963. After 1963, there was considerable fall successively each year till 1966. But it again started increasing thereafter till 1968, whereas in 1969 it was much below as compared to the preceding year.

Transfers within the panchayat samiti are made by a standing committee on Administration of the panchayat samiti.³³ While transferring a person before the expiry of two years of his posting to his circle, the panchayat samiti is required to seek prior permission of the district establishment Committee, which is authorised to make intra-district transfers.³⁴ As mentioned earlier, the selection commission is empowered to effect transfers outside the district.³⁵ The Act and the rules did not originally have any provision authorising the government to effect transfers of persons serving in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads services. By introducing an amendment in the Act, in January 1966, the government has taken in its hand supreme power of transferring these employees.³⁶ This amendment has helped the government to check unreasonable transfers, to make transfers which the government deems essential and bring coordination in different training programmes and transfers.

Other Functions

In addition, the commission performed some functions on *ad hoc* basis from time to time. Though essential, these functions are extra-constitutional.³⁷ They are categorised as follows:

- (a) Absorption of employees, and
- (b) Advisory function.

Absorption of Employees

In September 1963, the posts of compost inspectors, fieldmen and gram sewikas were abolished. In order to absorb the persons, thus rendered surplus, Rules 22-B and 22-C of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service rules, 1959, were framed after consulting the commission.³⁸

³³The Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, Section 86, Sub-section 9.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Rajasthan Gazette (Extraordinary) January 22, 1966 reads as follows: "(9A) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (9) the State Government may transfer any member of the service from one panchayat samiti to another panchayat samiti whether within the same district or outside it and may also stay the operation of or cancel any order or transfer made under Sub-section (9) of the rules made thereunder."

³⁷These functions are called extra-constitutional because they have not been described in the Act and the rules.

³⁸Vide First Report on the Working of the Commission, 1963, pp. 6-7.

The inspectors were to be selected and absorbed as village level workers (selection grade). Fieldmen and gram sewikas were already members of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service and they were to be absorbed as village level workers and lady teachers respectively in accordance with the procedure laid down in the above mentioned rules. After scrutinizing the cases, the commission issued allotment orders for the absorption of the surplus hands mostly in the panchayat samitis where the scheme for implementation of the government decision of having one village level worker for each gram panchayat was introduced.³⁹ Till December 1963, the total number of compost inspectors so absorbed as village level workers was 114 and fieldmen 188 and 179 gram sewikas had been absorbed as lady teachers.

In June 1967, the Government of Rajasthan abolished 765 posts of gram sewaks and 100 posts of project operators. In July 1967, the government abolished 15 artificial insemination centres and in October 1967, 50 posts of lower division clerks from various panchayat samitis. This resulted in many posts becoming surplus.

Under the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service rules, 1959, the commission is empowered to absorb the employees in other districts after receiving a list from the government.⁴⁰ Under the provision, the Government of Rajasthan gave a list containing names of 228 gram sewaks, 6 project operators, 8 stockmen, and 8 lower division clerks. Out of 228 surplus gram sewaks, 218 were absorbed in newly created posts of group panchayat secretaries and 10 were absorbed in the same district, where they became surplus, as after some time some posts of gram sewaks had become vacant there. Six surplus projector operators were absorbed in various panchayat samitis. Out of 8 surplus stockmen, 7 were absorbed in different districts and 1, who had become surplus from Ajmer district, was absorbed in Ajmer itself since a post of stockman was vacant there. Out of 8 lower division clerks, five were absorbed in different district till December 1967. Thirteen gram sewaks had become surplus in 1968. They were absorbed in the same years. One tractor driver was also absorbed who had become surplus in 1968.

Advisory Function

This function of the commission has not been specifically described in the rules as union public service commission's advisory function to the government has been separately mentioned in the constitution of India.⁴¹ For various amendments in the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service rules, 1959, and the framing of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads (district establishment committee) rules, 1961

³⁹ *Vide First Report on the Working of the Commission, 1963, pp. 6-7.*

⁴⁰ *Vide Rule 22(c) of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959.*

⁴¹ M.P. Sharma, *Public Administration in Theory and Practice*, 1962, pp. 323-24.

and the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads punishment and appeal rules, 1961, the commission was consulted and its comments were approved by the government.⁴²

FINANCES OF THE COMMISSION

The study of the financial administration of the organisation can let us know the magnitude of operations of the organisations.

Income

The commission has no income except the fee charged for the application forms.

The commission prescribed a form of application for direct recruitment under rule 16 of the Rajasthan panchayat samitis and zila parishads service rules, and the price of the form was fixed at 50 paise. Since a large number of applications for posts advertised by the commission belonged to rural areas, the commission supplied the application forms to all 26 zila parishad offices with instructions to the zila parishads secretaries selling the forms to maintain accounts for their sale, and to deposit the proceeds in the treasury. Table 8 indicates yearwise sale of these application forms.

TABLE 8 SALE OF APPLICATION FORMS

Year(s)	No. Sold	Cost
1959-60	8,600	Rs. 4,300.00
1960-61	13,689	Rs. 6,844.50
1961-62	20,254	Rs. 10,127.00
1962-63	41,968	Rs. 20,984.00
1964	16,600	Rs. 18,300.00
1965	22,769	Rs. 13,385.50
1966	27,143	Rs. 13,571.00
1967	22,942	Rs. 11,471.00
1.1.1968—31.3.1968	3,559	Rs. 1,779.50
1.4.1968—31.3.1969	21,583	Rs. 10,791.50
1969-70	27,120	Rs. 13,560.00

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

Expenditure

A lump sum grant of Rs. 26,600 was sanctioned to the commission for the year 1959-60. The details of expenditure for the subsequent years are given in Table 9.

⁴²The First Report on the Working of the Commission, 1963, pp. 10-11.

TABLE 9 EXPENDITURE ON VARIOUS HEADS

Year (s)	Pay of officers Rs.	Pay of establishment Rs.	Allowances and honoraria Rs.	Other charges Rs.	Total Rs.
1960-61	28,886	21,527	22,365	13,923	86,701
1961-62	34,765	23,216	31,110	17,289	1,06,380
1962-63	33,314	34,553	29,601	16,658	1,14,126
1963-64*	20,892	35,910	14,642	8,920	80,365
1964†	27,403	47,737	20,307	16,615	1,12,062
1965†	30,556	39,683	19,848	8,775	98,862
1966†	43,313	48,346	37,428	18,852	1,47,933
1967†	42,518	52,887	43,417	21,660	1,60,482
1968†	16,677	15,080	16,755	11,853	60,365
1968-69	47,099	62,686	67,114	24,460	2,01,359
1969-70	76,036	78,867	86,546	30,331	2,71,780

SOURCE : The reports on the Working of the Commission.

*Up to 31st December, 1963.

†Calendar year.

The lowest expenditure was Rs. 60,365 in 1968 whereas in 1969-70 it was as high as Rs. 2,71,780. Barring a few exceptions, the expenditure has shown a regular upwards tendency.

DISTRICT ESTABLISHMENT COMMITTEES

Under Section 88 of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, the selection commission had to form a district establishment committee (DEC) for each district.⁴³ Each DEC consists of the pramukh and the collector of the district concerned as its members and one of the permanent members of the commission as the chairman. The commission accordingly constituted DECs for all the districts.⁴⁴ The DEC thus acts as an extension of the commission and functions under the overall direction and supervision of the commission.

The secretaries of the zila parishads act as *ex officio* secretaries of these committees.

The DECs deal with matters relating to the allotment for initial appointment, promotion and transfer of the members of the Rajasthan panchayat

⁴³The Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁴The First Report on the Working of the Commission. At present all the 26 districts of Rajasthan have been divided into two-halves and the chairman acts as the chairman of the 13 DECs while the other member acts as the chairman of the remaining 13 DECs.

samitis and zila parishads services. It also hears appeals against the punishment imposed by the panchayat samitis. The panchayat samitis are empowered to withhold one increment of the defaulting member(s) of the panchayat samitis and zila parishads services. Punishments in excess of this can be imposed by the panchayat samitis only with the prior approval of the DEC concerned.⁴⁵ □

⁴⁵The Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, pp. 62-63.

A Profile of Development Bureaucracy in India*

V.A. Pai Panandiker and S.S. Kshirsagar

As a key policy and administrative institution, public bureaucracy has been the focus of many a research work in public administration, political science and sociology. The main concern of the researchers in public administration has been the part played by the bureaucracy in the formulation, shaping and implementation of public policy. Implicit in this policy role of the bureaucracy is that the behaviour of the civil servants profoundly affects the state policy, and sometimes even the character of the state itself.

The concerns about the role of the bureaucracy are especially important in the developing countries, like India, where the state has taken upon itself the responsibility of bringing about vast socio-economic changes through the instrumentalities of planning, etc. The brunt of this role and consequent responsibilities have inevitably fallen upon the public bureaucracy. As a result, both students and practitioners of public administration are evincing increasing interest in studying the behaviour of public servants in developing countries.

The interest in bureaucratic behaviour has naturally led to further efforts to identify the factors that direct and shape behaviour of civil servants. One group of factors, which has interested the researchers for its influence on bureaucratic behaviour, relates to the background characteristics of the civil servants. Questions are often asked: Who are the civil servants? What are their educational attainments? What is their family background and origin? Which occupational groups are they drawn from? What happened to them in their 'work-life'? To provide answers to these questions, a few research studies have been conducted in India in the last decade or more. Illustrative of these studies are those conducted by R.K. Trivedi

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XVIII, 1972, No. 3, pp. 505-32.

and D.N. Rao¹, V. Subramaniam², V.A. Pai Panandiker³ and C.P. Bhambhri.⁴

The study reported in this article was conducted as a part of a broader study of bureaucracy. However, in this article, the focus is confined largely to the profile of the Indian bureaucracy in the developmental spheres and how it compares with its counterparts in other countries. Admittedly, such comparisons are difficult to make due to differences in the sample of the civil servants studied, the socio-economic background characteristics considered, and the time of undertaking the studies. The comparative data presented in the following pages, therefore, need to be interpreted rather to arrive at a degree of commonality among the civil servants across national frontiers. To the extent that similarities in the profile of civil servants from different countries are identifiable, it could help in the development of a common body of knowledge useful both for theory building and in the administration of policies and programmes in many countries.

METHODOLOGY

The term 'development bureaucracy' is used here to describe civil servants working in government agencies essentially engaged in developmental programmes. The study was conducted in four such agencies. Two of these (Agencies *A* and *B* in Table 1) were engaged in development programmes in the field of industry and the remaining two (Agencies *C* and *D* in Table 1) carry out development programmes in the field of agriculture. Two of the four organisations studied (Agencies *A* and *C*) were central agencies and the other two (Agencies *B* and *D*), state agencies. Insofar as the type of office was concerned, three of the four agencies studied (Agencies *A*, *B* and *C*) were of the 'secretariat' type and the fourth (Agency *D*) was a field agency. All the four agencies were located in and around the Union Territory of Delhi to facilitate the interview and research effort.

For the purposes of the study, it was found that class III did not participate in any of the developmental work. Hence, the study was confined to class I, II (and) III civil servants employed in the above-mentioned four agencies. The total in all these three classes at the time of the study was 911 civil servants. The questionnaire was administered to all the 911 civil servants. Of these 723 responded giving the rate of response of 79.3 per cent. Table 1 describes the distribution of the respondent civil servants of this study according to their class and the agencies which employed them.

¹R.K. Trivedi and D.N. Rao, "Higher Civil Service in India", *Journal of the National Academy of Administration*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 33-64.

²V. Subramaniam, "Representative Bureaucracy: A Re-assessment", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4, pp. 1010-1019.

³V.A. Pai Panandiker, "Values, Attitudes and Motives of Civil Servants", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 12, 1966, No. 3, pp. 544-558.

⁴C.P. Bhambhri, *Bureaucracy and Politics in India*, Delhi, Vikas, 1970.

TABLE 1 RESPONDENTS BY CLASS AND EMPLOYING AGENCIES

<i>Agencies and class</i>	<i>Number responding</i>
Agency A (Industry) Total	215*
Class I	86
Class II	80
Class III	48
Agency B (Industry) Total	109
Class I	3
Class II	14
Class III	92
Agency C (Agriculture) Total	137
Class I	44
Class II	26
Class III	67
Agency D (Agriculture) Total	262
Class I	4
Class II	16
Class III	242
Grand Total	723

*One respondent did not report his class.

When classified according to their present class of service, about 19 per cent of the 723 respondents belonged to class I, about 18 per cent to class II and the remaining 63 per cent to class III. The part structured questionnaire, which the above mentioned 723 civil servants filled in, sought information about various aspects of themselves and their life experience including age, education, rural/urban upbringing, parental occupation, service in the government, advancement in the service, in-service training received, etc. The information, thus, obtained was coded, machine processed and analysed to yield the various tables and findings presented in the following sections.

We do not claim that the respondents in the present study constitute a representative sample of the civil service in India. The sample admittedly contains a much higher proportion of higher class civil servants than in the general composition of the civil service. Secondly, the study covered only two development sectors, namely, agriculture and industry and that too in a limited geographic sector. Nevertheless, the 723 civil servants in the sample of the study are engaged in the administration of important development programmes in which higher level public servants are often called upon

to play a crucial role. The study of the profile of such a group, is therefore, of considerable value both for studies of bureaucracy and even comparative public administration.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROFILE

The profile of these respondents was examined along the dimensions of marital status, rural/urban background, educational attainments, parental occupation, economic class origin, pre-entry experience, year and mode of entry into government service, upward mobility, in-service training received, and professional interests. The findings are presented below.

Age

As Table A in the Appendix⁵ shows, about 70 per cent of the total respondents of the study are in the age group of 21-40 years and the remaining 30 per cent, above 40 years. If those between 21-33 years are classified as 'young' those between 36-45 years as 'middle-aged' and those above 46 as 'older', it is found that 51.87 per cent of the respondents are 'young', 29.59 per cent 'middle aged' and 18.26 per cent 'older'. The age distribution of the respondents according to their class of service is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2 AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY CLASS OF SERVICE

<i>Age groups</i>	<i>Class of the respondents</i>		
	<i>Class I per cent</i>	<i>Class II per cent</i>	<i>Class III per cent</i>
Young (21-35)	23.3	34.6	65.9
Middle-aged (36-45)	40.9	32.3	25.4
Older (46)	35.8	33.1	8.7
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

Note : Mean Age : Class I—41.8 years.
 Class II—40.9 years.
 Class III—34.1 years, and
 Whole group—36.8 years.

⁵All basic tables describing the frequency distribution along background characteristics of the respondents are presented in the Appendix. Bi-variate tables are, however, incorporated in the body of the article.

A study⁶ of the higher civil servants (GS15-18) in the US Government shows that 82 per cent of them are 45 years old and over. Similarly, the higher civil servants in Britain have been found to include about equally high proportion of 'older' people.⁷ For comparative purposes, taking class I civil servants to be the higher civil servants, Table 2 shows that out of 137 class I respondents of the present study only about 36 per cent were 'older'. The higher civil servants at least in the development bureaucracy in India are thus, found to be much younger than those in the USA and the UK. An examination of some of the other experiences showed that the higher civil servants in developing countries like Egypt and Pakistan, also displayed a similar pattern. The Berger (1957)⁸ study of Egypt, for instance, showed that about 50 per cent of the higher civil servants were less than 45 years old. Similarly, Ahmed's (1964)⁹ study of the Pakistan civil service shows that about the same proportion of higher civil servants in Pakistan were less than 45 years of age.

Are the differences in the age of the respondents employed in the four agencies studied? Analysis of the data showed that the two central agencies (*A* and *C*) were somewhat composed of 'older' personnel, while the two state agencies (*B* and *D*) were found to be made up of younger people. The mean age of the respondents from agencies *A* and *C* was 40.8 and 38.6 years respectively, while the mean age of the respondents employed in the two State agencies *B* and *D* was 34.6 and 32.5 years respectively. This difference could, however, be explained by the fact that the lower level civil servants who are relatively younger in age were employed in large proportion in the state agencies.

Rural/Urban Background

An oftdebated point about representative bureaucracies, especially in the developing democracies, like India, is the adequate representation of rural and urban sub-cultures in the civil services. The argument is that the cultural differences between the urban and the rural backgrounds have significant implications in the performance of bureaucracies and the citizens responsible to them.

Assuming that the place of birth indicates rural/urban background, it was found (See Table *B* in the Appendix) that nearly 60 per cent of the respondents of this study came from rural background while only 22

⁶David T. Stanley, *The Higher Civil Service*, Washington (DC), Brookings Institution, 1964, p. 25.

⁷R.K. Kelsall, *Higher Civil Servants in Britain*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, pp. 198-200.

⁸Morroe Berger, *Bureaucracy and Society in Modern Egypt*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 41.

⁹Muneer Ahmed, *The Civil Servant in Pakistan*, London, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 47.

per cent came from urban and metropolitan backgrounds. However, the data also show that the weight of urban background increases when the criterion is the place lived in most by the respondents during adolescent years. Thus, in contrast to 60 per cent of the respondents born in rural areas, only about 50 per cent reported to have 'actually lived' in rural areas up to the age of 18 years. The migration to urban centres was probably for the purpose of secondary and higher education for which the facilities were not then available in the rural areas. Nonetheless, that the larger proportion of civil servants in the present sample had a predominantly rural background was important much as they did work in the agricultural and state level agencies even in the important field.

Further analysis of the rural/urban background of the civil servants, according to the class of service revealed interesting differences as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3 RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND BY CLASS

Place stayed in up to 18 years	Number of respondents		
	Class I Per cent	Class II Per cent	Class III Per cent
Rural	24.8	34.5	60.4
Semi-urban	30.7	28.0	14.3
Urban	27.0	22.8	12.2
Metropolitan	16.8	12.5	12.5
Not reported	0.7	2.2	0.6
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

Table 3 indicates that among the higher civil servants, especially in class I, there was a lower proportion of those brought up in rural surroundings and a higher proportion of those who spent their 'impressionable' years in urban type of areas. Again, these differences were found to be associated with differences in the levels of education attained by the respondents in the three classes. As reported later, the proportion of highly educated civil servants is much higher among the higher class than among the lower class.

Comparative data relating to the backgrounds of American and British civil servants could not be obtained. However, Berger's (1957)¹⁰ study noted that an overwhelming large proportion (97 per cent) of higher civil servants in Egypt had an urban background. The predominantly urban

¹⁰ Morroe Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

character of the elite in the civil service of developing countries is also demonstrated by a study of Indian Administrative Service personnel.¹¹ The study reported that 77 per cent of the IAS officers came from urban centres of population.

Apart from its importance for representative character of the Indian bureaucracy, the rural/urban background of the civil servants could also be considered useful for effective implementation of development programmes in the industrial and agriculture sectors. The findings of the study in this regard are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4 RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND AND AGENCIES STUDIED

Place stayed up to 18 age	Number reporting by agencies			
	A (Ind.) Per cent	B (Ind.) Per cent	C (Agri.) Per cent	D (Agri.) Per cent
Rural	26.1	42.2	41.6	73.7
Semi-urban	27.9	23.8	24.1	9.5
Urban	27.4	11.9	23.4	7.2
Metropolitan	17.2	22.1	10.2	8.0
Not reported	1.4	—	0.7	1.6
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=262)	100.0 (N=215)	100.0 (N=109)

As Table 4 indicates, except in Agency D, the employees in agriculture and industrial development agencies do not differ much in terms of their rural/urban background. The findings of the study about the civil servants in Agency D are encouraging because this agency handles most of the work relating to agricultural development programme at the field level. The predominantly rural background of the employees of this agency from a policy point of view could thus be a source of strength in its functioning. Similarly, Agency A deals with development programmes mostly of organised industry so that the urban background of a large proportion of its employees may be helpful in better appreciation of industrial matters. Overall, however, rural/urban background differences between the respondents according to the employing agencies were not found to be as sharp as those according to their class of service.

¹¹C.P. Bhambhani, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Parental Occupation

The parental occupational background of the civil servants studied is described in Table C in the Appendix. The most commonly reported family occupational background was: Government service, agriculture, and business. Almost equal proportion of the respondents have or had their parent serving either in the government, or engaged in agriculture or in business. In contrast, only little over 12 per cent of the civil servants in the sample belonged to the families of independent professionals and teachers.

It is interesting to compare the foregoing findings about the family background of the respondents of the present study with similar study conducted by Pai Panandiker among the civil servants working in a traditional governmental agency which was 'sufficiently bureaucratic in its structure'.¹² Table 5 shows difference in the family background of the two sets of civil servants.

TABLE 5 PARENTAL OCCUPATION COMPARED

Family background	Number reporting	
	Present study Per cent	Panandiker study Per cent
Government Service	27.9	45.0
Agriculturist	28.1	18.4
Business	27.4	25.6
Professionals	5.7	11.0
Teachers	6.8	—
Others	0.5	—
Not reported	3.6	—
Total	100.0 (N=723)	100.0 (N=109)

The study (Table 5) clearly indicates that the developmental and non-developmental or traditional government agencies are staffed by civil servants with varying family backgrounds. Apparently the children with the family background of government service are more attracted towards established traditional government agencies than towards the developmental agencies. Further analysis of the background of the respondents according to their class yielded the results (see Table 6).

It is apparent from the above mentioned results that while government service was a pronounced feature of the family background of class I and II

¹²V.A. Pai Panandiker, *op. cit.*

TABLE 6 PARENTAL OCCUPATION BY CLASS

<i>Parental occupation</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>		
	<i>Class I Per cent</i>	<i>Class II Per cent</i>	<i>Class III Per cent</i>
Government Service	34.3	36.0	23.6
Agriculturist	13.9	11.0	37.6
Business	23.4	28.7	28.3
Professional	9.5	11.0	2.9
Teaching	16.1	8.1	3.6
Other Occupation	0.7	2.2	—
Not reported	2.1	3.2	4.0
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

respondents, the class III respondents were more often the sons of agriculturists. In other words, the higher the class of respondents, the higher the chances of their coming from civil service family backgrounds. Similarly, the families of independent professionals, like doctors, lawyers and teachers, appear to contribute more to higher classes than to class III of the civil service.

These results of the present study about the family background of class I civil servants are comparable to V. Subramaniam's study about the socio-economic class origin of members of all India services : like IAS, IFS, IPS, and Accounts Service.¹³ He found the following pattern of family background of the members of these elite services: Government service 32.7 per cent; professionals (doctors, lawyers and the like) 13.02 per cent; business (businessmen and business employes) 18.9 per cent; agriculturists (land owners and farmers) 13.6 per cent; and other occupations (workers, artisans, etc.) 4.6 per cent. Thus, class I civil servants in the Government of India appear to have similar socio-economic class origins as the development bureaucracy covered in the present study.

Further analysis of the family background of the respondents according to the agencies studied showed the following results.

As expected, the results show (Table 7) that there is a higher representation of agricultural families in the agencies dealing with agricultural development programmes though in varying proportion between headquarters and field agency. Likewise, the business community contributed more personnel to the agencies concerned with industrial development

¹³V. Subramaniam, *op. cit.*

TABLE 7 PARENTAL OCCUPATION BY OFFICERS STUDIED

<i>Parental occupation</i>	<i>Number reporting by agencies</i>			
	<i>A (Ind)</i> Per cent	<i>B (Ind)</i> Per cent	<i>C (Agr)</i> Per cent	<i>D (Agr)</i> Per cent
Government Service	35.8	29.4	32.1	18.7
Agriculturists	10.7	14.7	22.6	50.8
Business	30.7	38.5	26.3	50.6
Professional	8.8	6.4	8.8	1.1
Teachers	8.8	6.4	8.8	4.2
Others	1.0	0.9	0.7	—
Not reported	4.2	3.7	0.7	4.6
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=262)	100.0 (N=215)	100.0 (N=109)

programmes. Table 7 also shows that the central agencies (*A* and *C*) include generally higher proportion of the sons of government servants than the state agencies (*B* and *D*). The former have also employed a higher proportion of civil servants from the families of independent professionals and teachers. On the other hand, except in agency *D*, the families of government servants appear to be similarly represented in the offices studied. Agency *D* is predominantly a field agency at the state level. The brunt of the work of this agency is carried out by class III civil servants who, as noted earlier, hail more often from the families of agriculturists than from those of civil servants.

There appears to be common tendency among developing countries that their higher level civil servants are drawn heavily from the families of Government servants. Thus Berger's study in Egypt revealed that about 40 per cent of higher civil servants were sons of government servants.¹⁴ Similarly, the parents of nearly two-thirds of the civil servants in Pakistan were found to be in government employment.¹⁵ In contrast, in a western country, like the UK only 10 per cent of the senior civil servants have parents in the civil service.¹⁶

Economic Class Origin

An important background characteristic which is so regarded in most countries and sociological studies is the economic class of origin. Amongst other things, a proper representation in this respect is believed

¹⁴Morroe Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁵Muneer Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁶R.K. Kelsall, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

to create a better appreciation and understanding of the problems of the common people. The general belief, however, is that the civil service in India is largely manned by the people from upper and middle classes. The present study does not bear out this impression.

The respondents were asked to report the income of their father/guardian at the time they took up their first job. The replies, as shown in Table D of the Appendix, indicate that as many as 52 per cent of the respondents come from middle lower or lower class families with the income of up to Rs. 250 per month. On the other hand, little over 11 per cent of the respondents were drawn from upper class families with monthly income of Rs. 751 and above.

The data also reveals (Table 8), as was expected, that a higher proportion of class I civil servants in the sample belonged to better off families is upper and/or middle class families (26 per cent in class I as against about 8 per cent each in class II and III).

TABLE 8 ECONOMIC CLASS ORIGIN BY CLASS OF SERVICE

<i>Parental class reported</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>		
	<i>Class I Per cent</i>	<i>Class II Per cent</i>	<i>Class III Per cent</i>
Upper	8.8	1.5	2.7
Upper-middle	17.6	7.3	5.0
Middle	33.6	46.3	24.9
Middle-lower	25.5	24.3	35.8
Lower	10.9	16.9	25.6
Not reported	3.6	3.7	6.0
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

Levels of Education

Of the various background characteristics, the levels of education attained by the civil servants is regarded as a crucial variable. In this study, it was found that nearly 50 per cent of the respondents did not have a university degree (Table E of the Appendix). Even so, the developmental agencies appear to have a somewhat higher proportion of university graduates than the traditional agencies. The Pai Panandiker study referred to earlier reported that 64 per cent of the respondents did not have any university education and that only 36 per cent were university educated.¹⁷ The results of

¹⁷V.A. Pai Panandiker, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

the present study also importantly show that almost 20 per cent of the respondents possessed post-graduate degree, suggesting a generally higher educational level in the developmental agencies.

Where did the respondents undergo their higher education? The data indicates that only 5 per cent of the respondents had received education in foreign universities. It is also interesting to note that about 13 per cent of the respondents reported to have attained the highest level of their education since joining the government service. These results suggest that advancement in the civil service has some relationship to the educational attainments. That it is so is also demonstrated by Table 9 about the levels of education of the respondents of this study according to their class.

TABLE 9 LEVELS OF EDUCATION BY CLASS

<i>Levels of education</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>		
	<i>Class I</i> <i>Per cent</i>	<i>Class II</i> <i>Per cent</i>	<i>Class III</i> <i>Per cent</i>
High School	1.5	14.7	60.6
Intermediate and equivalent	0.7	—	6.0
Diploma	6.5	11.8	1.5
Bachelor's degree	42.3	42.7	24.3
Master's degree	39.3	30.1	7.6
Doctorate	9.0	0.7	—
Not reported	0.7	—	—
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

As Table 9 shows, bulk of the class III civil servants were high school, graduates or have had some college education. In contrast, only about two per cent of the class I respondents have been educated at the level of intermediate or below. On the other hand, the proportion of university educated civil servants is found to be higher among the higher classes. Thus, among class I respondents 91 per cent had Bachelor's and higher degrees; in fact over 48 per cent held post-graduate degrees. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that about one-third of the class III civil servants in the sample were graduates and post-graduates.

How do the class I civil servants in the study compare with their counterparts in other countries in regards to their educational attainments? In the sample of the US civil servants studied by Stanley¹⁸, 96 per cent had

¹⁸David T. Stanley. *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Bachelor's or advanced degrees. Similarly, 90 per cent of the higher civil servants in Egypt are reported to have attained bachelor's and higher levels of university education.¹⁹ Ahmed's²⁰ study also shows that a vast majority of higher civil servants of Pakistan similarly possessed higher degrees. In other words, the higher civil servants in developed as well as developing countries, thus, appear to be generally a highly educated group.

We also analysed the educational levels of the respondents according to the agencies employing them. The results are described in Table 10.

TABLE 10 EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS BY AGENCIES STUDIED

<i>Levels of education attained</i>	<i>Number reporting by agencies</i>			
	<i>A (Ind) Per cent</i>	<i>B (Ind) Per cent</i>	<i>C (Agr) Per cent</i>	<i>D (Agr) Per cent</i>
High School	27.9	39.4	16.8	64.1
Diploma/some college education	12.0	12.0	4.4	5.0
University Degree	60.5	48.6	78.8	30.9
Not reported	0.9	—	—	—
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=262)	100.0 (N=215)	100.0 (N=105)

The levels of education attained by the civil servants in central agencies (*A* and *C*) is thus often higher than that of the civil servants working in state agencies (*B* and *D*). The data also show that the respondents concerned with agricultural development programmes at the field level have often less formal education than their counterparts in the secretariat. While 31 per cent of the respondents drawn from agency *D*, which is a block development office, were university educated, the proportion of university educated among the respondents of agency *C*, which is secretariat type, was found to be as high as 79 per cent.

We also enquired into the major academic fields of study of the respondents. Since some kind of specialisation is possible at the degree level and above, we considered only the university educated respondents for this purpose. As Table 11 shows, over 41 per cent of the graduate respondents studied social sciences for their university degree. On the other hand, technical or applied fields, like agriculture and engineering, explained 35 per cent of the university educated respondents and pure sciences for 22 per cent of the respondents.

¹⁹ Morroe Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁰ Muneer Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

TABLE 11 SUBJECTS STUDIED AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

<i>Subjects studied</i>	<i>Number reporting Per cent</i>
Agriculture and allied subjects	21.8
Physics, Chemistry, Geology, and Mathematics	22.3
Engineering	13.1
Social Sciences	41.4
Other fields of study	0.9
Not reported	0.5
Total	100.0 (N=367) ²²

The high percentage of graduates in scientific and technical subjects in the sample of the civil servants studied is explained by the fact that the nature of the functions of the four agencies was considerably specialised. In the earlier Pai Panandiker study of the civil servants in a traditional governmental agency, 68 per cent of the respondents who were university educated were found to have studied humanities and social sciences, while only 32 per cent were graduates in science subjects.²¹

Marital Status

A question of some sociological importance is the marital status of the respondents and their dependency responsibilities. It was found that about 92 per cent of the civil servants studied were married. The number of persons dependent on them varied between 1 and 5. It is, however, noteworthy that 55 per cent of the 'single' civil servants had dependency responsibilities. The data, thus, show that most of the civil servants in the present study were at a stage in their life when they should "begin taking things seriously".

Prior Experience

In trying to ascertain the work experience of the respondents before they entered the government service, the intent was to find out the extent to which civil service becomes the sole career as well as the extent of its open character. The study found that 62 per cent of the respondents entered the government service without having previous work experience. It is noted later that 80 per cent of the respondents of this study joined the government service initially in class III with very little or no experience of previous

²¹V.A. Pai Panandiker, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

²²Out of 723 respondents, 367 had university education. Remaining 356 respondents were matriculates, diploma holders or had limited college education.

work. It follows, therefore, that the bulk of the respondents who had previous experience joined the government service at the levels of class I and II.

The foregoing pages described the social background of the respondents. In the remaining part of this article we deal with the profile of the respondents as government employees.

Length of Service

As suggested in Table F of the Appendix, the bulk of the respondents (72 per cent) joined government service during the plan periods beginning 1950-51. This indicates that development bureaucracy in India grew mainly under the aegis of Five Year Plans and did not involve much transfer of personnel from other areas.

Further analysis showed that the respondents had put in an average of 13.8 years of service in the government. Earlier, it was noted that the average age of the respondents is 36.8 years. This implies roughly that the average respondent entered the government service at the age of 23. The recruitment to the civil service thus appears to be made largely on the basis of 'catch them young'.

As regards the mode of entry, it was found, as shown in Table G of Appendix, that little over 50 per cent of the respondents were recruited through employment exchange plus interview. Another mode of entry reported by the second largest group of respondents (30 per cent) is direct recruitment through open advertisement and interview by the concerned office. On the other hand, 15 per cent of the respondents came into the government service as a result of recruitment by open competitive examination of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) or the single oral interview by the Commission. That a small proportion of the respondents were recruited by the UPSC or the State Public Service Commission is explained by the fact that bulk of them entered the government service initially in the lower class of service, recruitment to which is outside the jurisdiction of the UPSC or the State PSC. The results also show considerable autonomy enjoyed by the development agencies studied in the matter of recruitment of personnel.

The data also showed that as at present, little over half of the respondents of this study were permanent employees in the government service, about 23 per cent are quasi-permanent and the remaining 27 per cent had a temporary status. This distribution of the respondents according to their employment status gives an idea of the stability of the development programmes handled by the agencies covered in the study as also of the recruitment policies of the government.

Class Initially Joined

The study showed that nearly 81 per cent of the respondents joined the

government service initially in class III and only little over 13 per cent in class I and II (Table H of Appendix). It is also noted that 3.2 per cent of the civil servants in the sample initially joined in class IV service. When the data relating to the present class composition of the respondents was juxtaposed with the class initially joined in by them, the following distribution pattern emerged (Table 12).

TABLE 12 CLASS INITIALLY JOINED BY THE CLASS AT PRESENT

<i>Class initially joined</i>	<i>Class at present</i>		
	<i>Class I Per cent</i>	<i>Class II Per cent</i>	<i>Class III Per cent</i>
Class I	28.5	—	—
Class II	27.7	14.7	—
Class III	32.1	83.1	94.0
Class IV	—	—	5.1
Not reported	11.7	2.2	0.9
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

It is evident from Table 12 that the initial intake of personnel in the civil service is predominantly at class III level. Nearly 69 per cent of the respondents now in class I and 83 per cent of respondents now in class II got there as a result of promotion from lower positions. The respondents have, thus, reported fairly high inter-class mobility which again is the result of the career staffing system in vogue in the government.

Upward Mobility

The question arising from the inter-class mobility of the respondents is how far each of them has advanced in the service in the government. As Table I of the Appendix shows, 34.4 per cent of the respondents have not got any promotion since joining the government service. About the same proportion of the civil servants in the sample reported to have received two or more promotions. Nearly 30 per cent were found to have been promoted once in the service.

Among the civil servants in the sample of who have been promoted once or more times, it was found that on an average they have advanced 1.8 positions in 17.8 years. These respondents have, thus, received on an average a promotion in about 9½ years. In comparison, the higher level civil servants in the US are reported to have advanced 6.3 grades in 20 years or

about one grade every 3 years.²³ The rate of progression in the civil service in India is thus relatively slow.

Further analysis of the upward mobility of the respondents according to their class at present revealed, as shown in Table 13 that class I respondents have enjoyed more promotional opportunities (2.41 on an average) than class II respondents (2.21 on an average), while class III respondents have had least advancement opportunities (1.60 on an average). If it is assumed that the civil servants in the higher class have joined the government service earlier than those in the lower class, the results imply that the opportunities for upward mobility in the government service have declined over a number of years.

TABLE 13 UPWARD MOBILITY BY CLASS AT PRESENT

Number of promotions	Number reporting		
	Class I Per cent	Class II Per cent	Class III Per cent
Nil	24.8	18.4	43.9
One	23.4	19.1	35.0
Two	17.5	36.1	14.7
Three	16.1	17.6	4.7
Four	14.6	7.3	1.1
Over four	2.9	1.5	0.2
Not reported	0.7	—	0.4
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

As regards the agencies studied, it was found that except for the state Agency *D*, dealing with agricultural development programmes in the field, other agencies studied have offered more or less equal number of promotional opportunities to an average promoted civil servant employed by them. Agency *D* also had the largest percentage of non-promotees (57 per cent) compared to those in the other three agencies (16-26 per cent).

In-Service Training

A question of special interest to students and practitioners of public administration is the formal training of the civil servants. The amount of formal training received by the civil servants in the sample of the present study is shown in Table *J* of the Appendix.

²³David T. Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

The study found that as many as 68 per cent of the respondents have not been exposed to any formal training during their service in the government. Only 16.5 per cent of the respondents appear to have received a reasonable amount of formal training, that is for a period of over three months. The remaining 15.3 per cent were trained for periods lasting only up to about three months.

As regards the type of training, the data showed that nearly 49 per cent out of the 232 trained respondents had received training in agriculture, including in extension and cooperation; 23 per cent were trained in managerial and executive skills; 12.5 per cent in technical work; and 13.5 per cent in secretarial work. In other words, formal training as a deliberate policy and managerial instrument appears to have been more systematically used in agricultural programmes than in others including the industrial ones.

The question whether the civil servants in the three classes differed in terms of the formal training received by them was also examined. The results are described in Table 14.

TABLE 14 FORMAL TRAINING RECEIVED BY CLASS AT PRESENT

<i>Length of training</i>	<i>Number receiving training</i>		
	<i>Class I</i> <i>Per cent</i>	<i>Class II</i> <i>Per cent</i>	<i>Class III</i> <i>Per cent</i>
Nil	63.5	62.5	71.2
Up to 3 months	14.6	19.8	14.2
3—6 "	11.0	10.3	7.1
6—12 "	5.1	2.2	3.3
12—24 "	5.1	3.7	3.8
Over 2 years	—	1.5	0.4
Not reported	0.7	—	—
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=449)

As Table 14 shows, the bulk of the civil servants in all the three classes has not thus been exposed to any formal training. Nor does the length of training received appear to vary according to the class of service. Further analysis, shows that among the trained class I respondents, the amount of formal training received was on an average 5.8 months and that among the trained class I respondents, it was 5.2 months. The figure for class III respondents was also about the same— $5\frac{1}{2}$ months to be precise. These results suggest that most of the formal training is imparted to the civil servants in the earlier years of their service in the government.

The study also found that the civil servants handling agricultural development programmes are more often formally trained than those handling industrial development programmes. While 40 per cent of the civil servant respondents working in the field of agricultural development were found to be formally trained, the number of trained civil servants in the industrial development programmes was only 21 per cent. However, the extent of such training amongst the trained respondents is found to be highly comparable, indicating thereby that the training efforts of both these agencies are thinly spread. It appears that the major focus of such training is to bridge gaps in the knowledge of the trainees required for the efficient performance of their immediate work assignments than to prepare them for a broad range of activities.

Professional Interests

Lastly, the respondents were asked about their professional interests because such interests indicated the desire of the respondents to expose themselves to new thoughts and norms of behaviour in the profession. The professional examinations passed by the respondents and their reading habits and membership of professional bodies gave us a rough measure of professional interests and perhaps development.

TABLE 15 PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS BY CLASS AT PRESENT

Type	Number reporting		
	Class I Per cent	Class II Per cent	Class III Per cent
Read professional journals only	36.5	25.0	6.9
Member of professional societies only	5.1	6.6	6.2
Read professional journals and member of professional societies	34.3	13.2	2.2
Neither read professional journals nor member of any professional association	24.1	55.1	84.7
Total	100.0 (N=137)	100.0 (N=136)	100.0 (N=499)

It was found that 90 per cent of the civil servants in the sample studied have not taken up any professional studies and examinations. The remaining 10 per cent have passed such examinations either before or after joining the government service; some reported to be preparing for them. Almost 68 per cent of the respondents neither read any professional journals nor

were members of any professional associations. The remaining 32 per cent respondents reported to be doing either of the two things or both the things, that is reading professional journals and holding membership of professional societies (see Table J of Appendix). When, however, the professional interests of the respondents were analysed according to the class of service, interesting differences were noticed as shown in Table 15.

The foregoing results are encouraging as they show that higher level civil servants more often evidence professional interests than lower level civil servants. As regards the agencies studied, it was found that the higher proportion of respondents in the state level agencies (*B* and *D*) do not have professional interests of the type considered in this study as that among the respondents working in central agencies (*A* and *C*). About 81 per cent respondents in the state agencies did not read any professional journals nor were members of professional associations. The percentage of such respondents in the central agencies was about 33 per cent. The difference in the professional interests of the respondents was more pronounced according to whether they were working in central or state agencies than according to the development sectors in which the agencies were engaged.

A PROFILE AND CONCLUSIONS

Before attempting any generalisations or conclusions on the basis of the profile of the development bureaucracy, one word of caution is warranted. The relationship of bureaucratic behaviour to the pre-service background characteristics has not yet been clearly established. Whether or not the family background for instance creates any 'value' problems is not known. On the other hand, post-entry service factors, such as training seem to show a greater degree of influence on such behaviour.²⁴ Besides, the theory of representative bureaucracy, however appealing, has yet to be proven.²⁵ To the extent that studies of bureaucratic profiles enable building theory of bureaucratic behaviour, they serve important academic purpose. However, the practical utility of using both the pre-service and post-service factors is greater especially in deciding the strategies of action relating to recruitment, selection, and training of bureaucrats.

Within these parameters, the following bureaucratic profile emerges from the present study. Development bureaucracy in India appears generally younger as compared to the traditional bureaucracy. In this respect, the development bureaucracy appears somewhat closer to the relatively

²⁴V.A. Pai Panandiker and S.S. Kshirsagar, *Civil Service and Development Administration in India*, New Delhi, IIPA, 1968 (Mimeo).

²⁵See for instance V. Subramaniam, "Representative Bureaucracy: A Reassessment" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4. pp. 1010-1019.

newer bureaucracies, such as of Egypt, as reported by Morroe Berger,²⁶ and of Pakistan, as reported by Muneer Ahmed.

Unlike the Egyptian bureaucracy, however, the development bureaucracy in India is more rural — 60 per cent on the basis of place of birth and 50 per cent on the 'actually lived' basis. A general conclusion on the findings of the study is that the lower the class of civil servants, the higher the rural background. Indeed, lower class jobs seem dominated by civil servants with rural background.

Insofar as the occupational background of parents is concerned, the development bureaucracy seems generally more 'representative' of the various national groupings as compared to the traditional bureaucracy. Comparisons with the Egyptian and Pakistan civil service in this respect also suggests that the distribution of Indian development bureaucracy is more even whereas the Egyptian and Pakistan bureaucracies are somewhat more inclined to reproduce themselves. A general conclusion, however, is that the higher the class of development bureaucrat, the greater the chance of his coming from civil service family background and, conversely, the lower the chance of coming from agricultural family background.

An important finding of the study is that the development bureaucracy in India is not dominated by the middle and upper middle classes which is the general pattern in many bureaucracies of both the developed and developing countries. To that extent, again, the 'representative' character of the development bureaucracy in India seems greater. However, the question whether this has any measurable impact on its performance remains to be answered.

The study also shows that development bureaucracy in India is more educated than the traditional bureaucracy. As expected, the higher the class of the respondents the greater was the level of educational attainments. In this respect, the Indian bureaucracy compares favourably with the US higher civil service groups. Another finding reveals that the developmental agencies of the Government of India have better educated bureaucrats. Insofar as the academic disciplines are concerned, the social sciences seem to dominate even in the development bureaucracy in India.

From a practical standpoint, an important finding about the development bureaucracy is that the level of training of most of the civil servants is highly inadequate. In fact, the majority of the respondents did not seem to have received any training at all. Secondly, the development of professional interests even in the more technically based and oriented bureaucracy appears rather low. The higher class, however, revealed more positive influence in this regard which lends a degree of sophistication and developmental potential to it.

What then are the major conclusions? Studies of bureaucratic profiles

²⁶Morroe Berger, *op. cit.*

may not in themselves lead to any significant conclusions unless the relationships between profile characteristics and bureaucratic behaviour are clearly established. Yet, in the absence of such established relationships, bureaucratic profiles do provide a means of studying the likely orientations. For example, the heavy urban background of the higher civil servants could be expected to create difficulties in the smooth operations of the developmental agencies in key administrative respects. Besides the identification of important post-entry factors help considerably the use of such studies for practical purposes. Finally, it can be concluded that studies of profiles, if conducted in conjunction with behavioural studies of bureaucracies, would more effectively help in theory building as well as in solving real life problems.

Appendix

BASIC TABLES

TABLE A AGE

<i>Age groups</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
21-25 years	49	6.78
26-30 years	144	19.92
31-35 years	182	25.17
36-40 years	128	17.70
41-45 years	86	11.89
46-50 years	65	8.99
Over 50 years	67	9.27
Not reported	2	0.28
Total	723	100.00

TABLE B RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND

<i>Rural/urban Background</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>			
	<i>By place of birth</i>		<i>By place lived up to age 18</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Rural	432	59.8	352	48.7
Semi-urban	121	16.7	144	19.9
Urban	108	14.9	123	17.0
Metropolitan	52	7.2	96	13.3
Not reported	10	1.4	8	1.1
Total	723	100.0	723	100.0

NOTE—Rural = Up to population of 10,000. Semi-Urban = With population of 10,000-1,00,000. Urban = With population of 1 to 10 lakhs. Metropolitan = With population over 10 lakhs.

TABLE C PARENTAL OCCUPATIONS

<i>Parental occupations</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Government Service	202	27.9
Agricultural	203	28.1
Business : self-employed or employed by others	198	27.4
Independent professional	41	5.7
Teaching	49	6.8
Other occupations	4	0.5
Not reported	26	3.6
Total	723	100.0

TABLE D ECONOMIC CLASS ORIGIN

<i>Parental class reported</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Upper	26	3.6
Upper-middle	56	7.7
Middle	221	30.6
Middle-lower	229	31.7
Lower	153	21.1
Not reported	38	5.3
Total	723	100.0

NOTE.—Upper = Income of over Rs. 1,500 p.m.; Upper-middle = Rs. 751-1,500 p.m.; Middle = Rs. 251-750 p.m.; Middle-lower = Rs. 151-250 p.m.; and Lower = Less than Rs. 150 p.m.

TABLE E LEVELS OF EDUCATION

<i>Levels of education attained</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
High School	294	40.7
Intermediate and equivalent	28	3.9
Diploma	32	4.4
Bachelor's Degree	225	31.1
Master's Degree	129	17.8
Doctorate	13	1.8
Not reported	2	0.3
Total	723	100.00

TABLE F LENGTH OF SERVICE

<i>Length of service</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Over 30 years	21	2.9
25-30 years	81	11.2
19-24 years	101	14.0
13-18 years	135	18.7
7-12 years	246	34.0
1- 6 years	120	16.6
Less than one year	13	1.8
Not reported	6	0.8
Total	723	100.0

TABLE G MODE OF ENTRY

<i>Mode of entry</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Through Employment Exchange plus interview	366	50.6
Direct by office through advertisement and interview	221	30.6
Through a single interview by the UPSC/State PSC	89	12.3
Through Competitive examination of UPSC/State PSC	23	3.2
Other methods	20	2.8
Not reported	4	0.5
Total	723	100.0

TABLE H CLASS INITIALLY JOINED

<i>Class initially joined</i>	<i>Number joining</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Class I	39	5.4
Class II	58	8.0
Class III	579	80.1
Class IV	23	3.2
Not reported	24	3.3
Total	723	100.0

TABLE I UPWARD MOBILITY

<i>Number of promotions received</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Nil	256	35.4
One	215	29.8
Two	139	19.2
Three	67	9.3
Four	35	4.8
Over four	7	1.0
Not reported	4	0.5
Total	723	100.0

TABLE J PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF THE RESPONDENTS

<i>Type of professional interest</i>	<i>Number reporting</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Read professional journals only	115	16.0
Member of professional society only	75	10.4
Read professional journals and member of professional society	44	6.0
Neither read professional journals nor member of any professional society	488	67.5
Not reported	1	0.1
Total	723	100.0

□

Panchayati Raj in India Retrospect and Prospect*

G.C. Singhvi

THE UNION government had, a few months ago, urged all the state governments to ensure that there is genuine transfer of functions and delegation of administrative and financial powers to panchayati raj (PR) bodies.¹ Stress in that compelling communication had particularly been laid on three issues which are of considerable operational significance indeed to panchayati raj.

One is that the panchayati raj bodies which were supposed to be the agencies for socio-economic planning in rural areas have become mere executive agencies of the state governments.²

The other is that these bodies are not financially sound because very meagre resources have been assigned to them.

The last is that though the panchayati raj bodies were envisaged to be representative in character, no state has had elections regularly.

The union government had, in these circumstances, regretted that the state governments have not kept up the underlying spirit of the panchayat programme.

What has been set out in the preceding paragraphs reveals that panchayati raj is bedevilled and the union government has publicly voiced its dissatisfaction with the functioning of the panchayat bodies.

This, in other words, shows that panchayati raj is sick and suffering from certain debilitating ailments which are coming in the way of its becoming a success.

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol XXII, 1976, No. 3, pp. 478-94.

¹IIPA Newsletter, Vol. XIX, No. 6—June 1975. News item: "Genuine Transfer of Powers to Panchayat Bodies Urged". The Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi.

²"The tradition of centralism in the country makes the local body more a kind of administrative agent of the state government, subject to the same conditions of discipline as its paid employees, rather than a Government authority with some exclusive jurisdiction or initiative of its own"—Harold Zink, Arne Wahlstrand, F. Benwenutl and R. Bhaskaran, *Rural Local Government in Sweden, Italy and India: A Comparative Study*, London, 1957, p. 81.

It is in this backdrop that an attempt is being made in this paper broadly to identify the ailments and suggest cures so that panchayati raj may steer clear of the pitfalls.

DISTRUST : GOVERNMENTAL AND BUREAUCRATIC

Panchayati raj had to encounter potent and generalised distrust from its very birth (and many voices have pronounced its funeral oration already).³

The political leaders at the state level, the MLAs and even the bureaucrats saw in its birth and anticipated in its ascendancy an irreparable loss of power for themselves which was quite understandable, though not at all justifiable.

They, therefore, while outwardly espousing the cause of panchayati raj, were in their heart antagonistic to it, and as such worked in a manner in which they would take back by the left hand what they half heartedly gave by the right.⁴ In other words, they resorted to subterfuges for the maintenance of their supremacy.

The inevitable result was that panchayati raj and democratic decentralisation witnessed administration of inadequate doses of democracy and decentralisation and in the process panchayati raj ironically became a casualty.

For, the democratic and decentralisation processes, unless administered in a full dose, do not have the potentiality to serve as their own correctives and, in the absence of a full dose, all high sounding language that may be used to articulate panchayati raj will ring hollow.⁵

It must, however, be said to the credit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that he reckoned with this distrust and cautioned against it in no uncertain terms:

When we talked of panchayati raj many people were rather doubtful about the capacity of our people to shoulder this burden. I was certain they would make mistakes. Nevertheless, I knew we shall get over this difficulty and gradually develop the system of self-government at every stage. There can be no half-way house in this vital matter. Either you trust the people or you do not. Trusting them partly takes you

³See "Panchayats Have Failed in Assam", *Hindustan Standard*, Calcutta, January 29, 1971.

⁴"There is hardly a country where the gap between ideals and performances is so big as in India." Then again "in India there is so much difference between theory and practice that, while ideas soar high, execution is meagre". *Jawaharlal Nehru on Community Development and Panchayati Raj*. A Government of India publication, February 1963, pp. 10 and 17, respectively.

⁵"A veteran Congress worker and an MP from Rajasthan in his evidence before the Sadiq Ali Committee held the view that there should either be complete democratic decentralisation or no decentralisation". Dr. Iqbal Narain, "Developmental Administration under Panchayati Raj : The Rajasthan Experience," *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, January-March, 1968, p. 56 n.

nowhere, because it does not give them real responsibility and they do not develop properly. Having given this authority and power to them, you should not tamper with it by official interference. Let them make mistakes and let them suffer for those mistakes. The officials must only be advisers; they must not be bosses.⁶

But the officers did become bosses. And the state level political bosses always viewed panchayati raj with suspicion, little realising that these panchayati raj bodies offered a potential outlet in terms of government power for the local party zealots. These new avenues, if they had been made attractive, could not only have absorbed 'unsatisfied party workers' but also would have acted as "a training and providing ground for promotion up the party ladder".⁷

But the political and bureaucratic bosses did not deviate from their distorted perception and did not soften their attitude and approach towards panchayati raj with the result that panchayati raj was hamstrung.

It may be well to remember that the crux of the administrative change under panchayati raj is the problem of role equilibrium in regard to officials and non-officials from State level down below and the pattern of inter and intra-institutional and personnel relationships.⁸

SELF-HELP AND MOBILISATION

In the climate prevailing in the country at the time of birth and infancy of panchayati raj arising out of foreign aid pouring into the country, and centralised missionary approach trying to transform masses, the panchayati raj bodies started "expecting everything from the government rather than instilling the objectives of mass mobilisation and voluntary self-help".

And not until the panchayati raj bodies endeavoured to attain (and would attain) self-sufficiency, could the government "expect to fulfil developmental, much less political, objectives enunciated in the directive principles of the Indian Constitution".⁹

We must, therefore, develop a new awareness of and recognise the problems connected with self-help and mobilisation as incomparably more urgent than hosts of other problems visibly arrayed.

CITIES AND TOWNS INSULATED

Cities and towns having municipal corporations, municipal councils

⁶Address at the Annual Conference of State Ministers of Community Development and Panchayati Raj in New Delhi, on August 3, 1962.

⁷W.H. Morris-Jones, "The Government and Politics of India", London, 1967, p. 189.

⁸Dr. Iqbal Narain, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁹Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Ltd., 1970, pp. 133-134.

and town municipalities have not been brought within the area of operation of panchayati raj and a panchayati raj which excludes cities and towns from its operation could hardly be termed as all embracing and complete. Concomitantly, this operational deficiency panchayati raj is beset with has caused the psychological undoing of the panchayati raj.

For unless it extends to the whole district or the whole state or the whole country it cannot generate proper enthusiasm and create an impact.

Cities and towns having the headquarters of the zila parishads and panchayat samitis never evince any interest in these bodies as they feel they are unconcerned.

Furthermore people who matter the most in the national life, state life or district life belong to these urban areas and because of this inexcusable exclusion they have not developed any vested interest in panchayati raj.

✓ Panchayati raj has consequently acquired a rural overtone and a truncated personality.

This ailment could be remedied by extending the panchayati raj system to all the cities and towns by dividing them into wards having population analogous to the population of standard village panchayats and creating ward panchayats therefor.

On that base a panchayati raj pyramidal structure consisting of panchayat samitis and zila parishads could be raised.

There may be big towns and small cities which could have a panchayat samiti each.

Cities having a population of over half a million (like Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Bangalore, Agra, Allahabad, Poona, Indore, Jubalpore, Jaipur, Madurai, Kanpur, Lucknow, Varanasi and Patna) could have city zila parishads.

And cities having a population of over 2.5 million like Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay and Madras could be converted into city states and their constituents could have zila parishads, panchayat samitis and ward panchayats.

In this manner all the cities and towns¹⁰ could be brought within the purview of panchayati raj and the existing anomaly of having two sets of local government—one for the urban areas and the other one for the rural areas with the resultant confusions and imbalances generated by the duality could be done away with.

STATUS BOOSTING SYMBOLS

Panchayati raj has received a great setback not so much because of

¹⁰“Certainly if a new India is to be created, it will have to have its roots in the villages and districts and cities, and here the local bodies and state governments will either be agencies of change or bottlenecks too narrow to permit the entrance of vitalising forces into those areas where most of the people of India dwell.” Norman D. Palmer, ‘*The Indian Political System*’ Boston, 1970, p. 174.

the incompetence or disinterestedness on the part of the non-officials but because of the indifferent treatment meted out to them.

The scheme needed incentives just as an infant needs support to be able to stand up on his own legs. These incentives were zealously (or jealously?) withheld.

And then we blame the non-officials for the failure of the system. In the words of John Ruskin:

You knock a man into a ditch, and then you tell him to remain content in the position in which Providence has placed him.¹¹

The incentives that should have been provided could have been like the ones that follow.

The Pramukh of the zila parishad should be number one citizen of the district. Whenever the President or the Prime Minister of India, the Governor, Chief Minister of the State or any other VIP comes to the district, the Pramukh of the zila parishad should receive him and then he should introduce the officials and non-officials of the district to the VIP.

He must have a status equivalent to that of a minister of a state government. All gazetted officers on posting to the district should call on him in his office.

He should have an armed police guard at his residence. He should be entitled to fly national flag at his residence, and on his personal as also State cars.

He should endorse the annual confidential reports of all the district level officers (connected with developmental administration).

He should not be made a member of any committee which is presided over by any official of his district. If inclusion of a representative of the zila parishad, however, becomes imperative, the secretary of the zila parishad should be nominated for the purpose.

He should also take the salute at the public ceremonial parades on the Independence Day and the Republic Day.

Finally, the Collector or the Chief Executive Officer, whosoever he be, should extend to him the same dignified treatment as the state chief secretary extends to the state Chief Minister above and the BDO (vikas adhikari) extends to the pradhan of the panchayat samiti below.

Similar incentives could be devised for the pradhan of the panchayat samitis and the sarpanchas of the panchayats in their respective areas of operation.

¹¹John Ruskin, "The Crown of Wild Olive", George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London, para 40 of Lecture on 'Work'.

One may ask as to what the relevance is of these phenomena to the developmental administration of a district.

To such an inquirer the author's humble reply would be that these tools are status symbols and have always been made use of with advantage for enhancing the status of ministers and civilians.

If these status symbols which are compatible with power, privilege and prestige are bestowed on the non-officials at the helm of affairs in the developmental administration of a district, tehsil or ward, village, panchayati raj will unquestionably get a boost up.¹²

JUDICIAL PANCHAYATS—MISSING DETAILS

The nyaya panchayats were to be the judicial wing of panchayati raj. Acts and rules were framed but minor details on which the operation of the Act and rules depended were not worked out as a part of follow up action.

To illustrate, judicial panchayats are debarred from taking cognizance of offences in which the accused person has previously been convicted in certain types of offences.

The question that unavoidably arises is how shall judicial panchayats known whether the accused person who has come up before them has been convicted in any of the offences enumerated. It has also not been laid down who shall maintain the record of all such convictions.

Similarly, if a complaint relating to the commission of a crime is lodged simultaneously with the judicial panchyat and with the police or judicial magistrate, who will proceed with it and who will not, has also not been laid down.

Some system will have to be devised whereby each one of these three agencies comes to know about complaints lodged with the other two.

Instances like these could be multiplied. In sum, follow up action in pursuance of the acts and rules need to be taken up in all earnestness without which the act and rules will be not only meaningless but self-defeating also.¹³

ECONOMICAL AUDIT OF PERFORMANCE

Vesting of powers in and expectations of performance from panchayati raj bodies presuppose an efficient and efficacious system of audit not only of income and expenditure but of achievements and failures as well.

While it is easy to induct an audit oriented system for panchayat samitis and zila parishads, it is the village panchayat which has been facing a real difficulty in this behalf.

¹²See author's article "Panchayati Raj Hamstrung : A Problem of Power" *Kurukshetra*, New Delhi, June 1, 1971, pp. 3-4.

¹³For details refer "Criminal Jurisdiction of Nyaya Panchayats", *Kurukshetra*, New Delhi, November 16, 1970, pp. 3-4.

Cases of embezzlement of money have occurred in many village panchayats which in turn has eroded the credibility of the village panchayat and the panchayati raj.

Since having an organisation for conducting such an audit of village panchayats does not seem to be within the realm of a possibility in a foreseeable future, we shall have to think of giving a village panchayat in adoption to a government officer drawing, say, a pay of Rs. 250 p.m. and above. (It is hoped the number of such government officers in any district would exceed the number of village panchayats in that district).

This officer, a friend, guide and philosopher (or big brother) of the panchayat should be able formally to inspect the panchayat (both accounts and performance) twice and, in addition, pay two surprise visits also in a year.

In addition, he should be available to the sarpanch at his own (not sarpanch's) headquarters on request for consultation. And for rendering all these services, the officer concerned should duly be compensated in the form of travelling and other allowances.

In the emerging pattern, the imparting of a week or a fortnight's intensive training in the working of panchayati raj to these officers, to equip them with necessary knowledge, to enable them effectively to inspect and guide the village panchayat will be imperative.

These officers should submit their reports to the district panchayat officer or may be the district development officer.

A matchless advantage which is likely to accrue out of this system would be that an overwhelming majority of government officers will have to rub shoulders with and develop an intrinsic interest in panchayati raj in action.

At present such an interest and involvement are rather conspicuous by their very absence.

PANCHAYAT SECRETARIES' CADRES

The system of panchayati raj has suffered from a lack of regular cadre of secretaries of village panchayats when actually secretaries should be quite knowledgeable. For they will be the focal persons and have the same powers and status in the jurisdiction of the panchayat as the district officer of today has in his district. They should be *ex officio* special police officers also and in that limited role will be part of the district police. They should, therefore, be secondary pass and in addition be holders of a two year diploma in panchayati raj to be specially devised for equipping secretaries for handling all matters connected with panchayats. Avenues of promotions should also be opened for these secretaries so that in the developmental departments they may be able to go up. By having such a regular

cadre of secretaries of panchayats the working of panchayats is likely to register a welcome improvement.

STANDARDISATION : PROCEDURE AND FORMS

Standardisation of procedure and printing of forms and registers have not been bestowed upon the attention they deserve.

Since the number of panchayats is and shall be quite large in every State, the standard forms and registers should be got centrally devised, printed and issued to all the panchayats and other panchayati raj bodies so that there will be uniformity in the maintenance of record and at the same time chances of misuse of funds or, may be powers, will also, to some extent, be minimised.

It shall have to be ensured that the supplies of forms and registers made to the panchayati raj bodies are quite adequate with reference to the requirement.

DEVELOPMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

With the introduction of the panchayati raj system no substantial change was made in the structure of the administrative services, officers of which were and are utilised for manning senior positions in the departments connected with panchayati Raj.

To start with, the administrative services—Indian as well as the states—should be bifurcated into two broad branches: developmental administrative services and regulatory administrative services.

The former should man posts in departments connected with and handle developmental activities like agriculture, industries, medicine and health, ayurved, family planning, education, social welfare, PWD (buildings and roads), irrigation, public health engineering cooperation, animal husbandry, forests, mining and geology, colonisation, tourism, town planning, etc.

The latter should man posts in departments connected with regulatory activities like police, prisons, excise, taxation, land revenue settlement, civil supplies, civil defence, devasthan, home guards, anti-corruption, prosecution, transport, labour, settlement, employment, treasuries, etc.

The executive officer of the panchayat samiti should be a member of the state developmental administrative service.

The chief executive officer of the zila parishad should be a member of the Indian developmental administrative service (IDAS).

The creation of such services will help a lot in robust attitude formation and development of professionalism by understanding the subtleties and nuances of panchayati raj which are the crying need of the day.

The trend of having traditional collector and an independent district development officer, both belonging to the IAS, has gained considerable credence and some States have already adopted this viable strategy.

The latest to join the club is perhaps Bihar, where with the restructuring of district administration in 1973, the authority of the traditional collector already stands eroded (and this erosion will prove to be in the interest of panchayati raj) because the vast areas of development, planning and welfare has been entrusted to the deputy development commissioner who acts as the chief executive officer of the zila parishad.¹⁴

What remains to be achieved on this front is the extension of this valuable practice to the remaining states and the bifurcation of the administrative services into regulatory administrative and developmental administrative services as envisaged above.

A line has to be drawn somewhere and clinging to old notions would amount to indulging in self deception.

REMUNERATION TO REPRESENTATIVES

Panchayati raj suffered yet another setback because we made it subscribe to the hypocritical theory that public service is its own reward and, therefore, those rendering public service need not be paid any salary or honorarium. It is refreshing to remember what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had once observed: "There is in India an extraordinary and thoroughly unjustified prejudice against receiving salaries from public funds".¹⁵

An extension of this prejudice to a limited extent makes us impassionately cry if any attempt is made to increase the emoluments of MLAs, MPs or ministers.

This is a deep cutting and inertia causing malady which has got to be remedied by granting suitable and adequate remuneration to elected citizens doing some work or the other connected with panchayati raj. For, realities do raise their heads and have as such to be viewed with perspective and faced with courage and determination.

PANCHAYATI RAJ AND POLICE

Just as the pioneers of panchayati raj left out municipal administration from their domain, they did not touch police administration also in any way whatsoever.

It is conceded that the police discharge a quasi-judicial function comprising prevention and detection of offences and, therefore, they should be accountable only to the State Government and to no other agency.

Steps, however, could certainly have been taken to ensure collaboration

¹⁴Haridwari Rai and Awdhesh Prasad, "Reorganising Panchayati Raj in Bihar: A Critique of the Reform Proposals", *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, January-March, 1975, p. 41.

¹⁵Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, Allied Publishers, 1962, p. 107.

cadre of secretaries of panchayats the working of panchayats is likely to register a welcome improvement.

STANDARDISATION : PROCEDURE AND FORMS

Standardisation of procedure and printing of forms and registers have not been bestowed upon the attention they deserve.

Since the number of panchayats is and shall be quite large in every State, the standard forms and registers should be got centrally devised, printed and issued to all the panchayats and other panchayati raj bodies so that there will be uniformity in the maintenance of record and at the same time chances of misuse of funds or, may be powers, will also, to some extent, be minimised.

It shall have to be ensured that the supplies of forms and registers made to the panchayati raj bodies are quite adequate with reference to the requirement.

DEVELOPMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

With the introduction of the panchayati raj system no substantial change was made in the structure of the administrative services, officers of which were and are utilised for manning senior positions in the departments connected with panchayati Raj.

To start with, the administrative services—Indian as well as the states—should be bifurcated into two broad branches: developmental administrative services and regulatory administrative services.

The former should man posts in departments connected with and handle developmental activities like agriculture, industries, medicine and health, ayurved, family planning, education, social welfare, PWD (buildings and roads), irrigation, public health engineering cooperation, animal husbandry, forests, mining and geology, colonisation, tourism, town planning, etc.

The latter should man posts in departments connected with regulatory activities like police, prisons, excise, taxation, land revenue settlement, civil supplies, civil defence, devasthan, home guards, anti-corruption, prosecution, transport, labour, settlement, employment, treasuries, etc.

The executive officer of the panchayat samiti should be a member of the state developmental administrative service.

The chief executive officer of the zila parishad should be a member of the Indian developmental administrative service (IDAS).

The creation of such services will help a lot in robust attitude formation and development of professionalism by understanding the subtleties and nuances of panchayati raj which are the crying need of the day.

The trend of having traditional collector and an independent district development officer, both belonging to the IAS, has gained considerable credence and some States have already adopted this viable strategy.

The latest to join the club is perhaps Bihar, where with the restructuring of district administration in 1973, the authority of the traditional collector already stands eroded (and this erosion will prove to be in the interest of panchayati raj) because the vast areas of development, planning and welfare has been entrusted to the deputy development commissioner who acts as the chief executive officer of the zila parishad.¹⁴

What remains to be achieved on this front is the extension of this valuable practice to the remaining states and the bifurcation of the administrative services into regulatory administrative and developmental administrative services as envisaged above.

A line has to be drawn somewhere and clinging to old notions would amount to indulging in self deception.

REMUNERATION TO REPRESENTATIVES

Panchayati raj suffered yet another setback because we made it subscribe to the hypocritical theory that public service is its own reward and, therefore, those rendering public service need not be paid any salary or honorarium. It is refreshing to remember what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had once observed: "There is in India an extraordinary and thoroughly unjustified prejudice against receiving salaries from public funds".¹⁵

An extension of this prejudice to a limited extent makes us impassionately cry if any attempt is made to increase the emoluments of MLAs, MPs or ministers.

This is a deep cutting and inertia causing malady which has got to be remedied by granting suitable and adequate remuneration to elected citizens doing some work or the other connected with panchayati raj. For, realities do raise their heads and have as such to be viewed with perspective and faced with courage and determination.

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between panchayati raj and the police even without empowering the panchayati raj bodies to interfere with the working of the police.

This induction, to start with, could have been done at the zila parishad and the panchayat samiti levels.

The district superintendent of police of a district could be asked to attend one meeting of zila parishad every month in which maintenance of law and order in the district could be discussed in a general way. The sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) could similarly be asked to attend one meeting of the panchayat samiti every month for the same purpose. The district SP could, in addition, be asked by turn and in rotation to attend one meeting of a panchayat samiti in his district every month. Such meetings would provide an opportunity to the elected leaders of the people to discuss their problems with the police officers.

Police officers would also get an opportunity to come in contact with and collect first hand information from the elected representatives. By this token police public relations will be put on an even keel and register a tremendous boost. It shall, however, have to be kept as an indispensable condition that in such meetings the merits of specific cases will not be discussed.

After the meeting is over, the district SP or the SDPO could sit in one of the rooms of zila parishad/panchayat samiti building and hear individual complaints from members of the panchayati raj bodies about specific cases. Some system could be devised in which these complaints could be duly registered and action taken there or be personally communicated to the complaining member in the next meeting or thereafter as and when the enquiry may be completed.

Such a step, it may be reiterated, would go a long way in bringing about an improvement in panchayati raj administration as well as in police administration and a sound rapport between the two.

MAGISTERIAL SAFEGUARD

Some unscrupulous pieces of action taken by the panchayati raj bodies, particularly of the type in which *status-quo-ante* cannot be restored, like getting a house or a wall demolished, etc., have brought rather a bad name to the panchayati raj system.

There have been instances in which village panchayats acted deliberately arbitrarily after the court hours on Saturdays or on Sundays and the poor aggrieved person consequently could not knock at the doors of the courts of law to have speedy redress in the form of a stay order.

To improve upon the image of the panchayati raj, it is, therefore, suggested by way of a safeguard for the citizens that executive magistrates should be empowered to grant stay orders against such allegedly arbitrary orders issued by the panchayati raj bodies.

Once orders are stayed, the issues involved could be thrashed out before the executive magistrate.

One thing is there. The executive magistrates shall have to be accessible for the purpose all the twenty-four hours.

Such an institutionalised safeguard would tend to impart considerable credibility to the panchayati raj system.

RETROGRADE INDIRECT ELECTIONS

The present system of elections to panchayati raj bodies is rather defective mainly because it is visibly indirect. In the village panchayat, the voter does directly elect panchas as well as the sarpanch but the drawback of the system is that the possibility of sarpanchas and the panchas belonging to different camps cannot be ruled out altogether. The system of elections in the panchayat samitis and zila parishads is undeniably indirect because citizen voters as such have no say in these elections.

The electoral college consists of the sarpanchas and panchas of village panchayats in case of panchayat samitis and sarpanchas of village panchayats and pradhans of panchayat samitis in case of zila parishads. These panchayati raj bodies are, therefore, to a great extent bereft of representative character and fail to engender citizen involvement in panchayati raj to the extent it is necessary and possible. The incongruity there is clear.

This ailment could be remedied by having an executive body as a team in the panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads, and making the electoral college consist of all eligible citizen voters.

To illustrate, if it be decided that panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads will have an executive body each, consisting of a homogenous team of five members each including the sarpanch, pradhan and pramukh, respectively, the citizen will vote for teams instead of for individuals. Thus, for contesting elections, for example, to the zila parishad executive body, a person aspiring to be pramukh will have to take with him four of his associates who will work as his members of the executive body and contest the election as a team.

There will be a number of such teams before the citizen voters and they would have a right to vote a team in.

Persons elected to these bodies in this manner will be endowed with a team spirit, have the backing of the citizens and will have a sense of satisfaction that they truly represent the entire unit.

Other members of the panchayat samiti and other members of the zila parishad could be elected in the manner it is being done at the moment. Once this dose of democracy is administered to panchayati raj, it will remarkably become representative in character and responsive in approach. In the ultimate analysis the powers that be will dutifully look more towards the common man than towards the elected representatives of the people.

PRAMUKH TO BE MP—PRADHAN TO BE MLA

There is, so to say, a dichotomy between the members of the State Legislative Assemblies and pradhans of panchayat samitis, on the one hand, and between the members of the parliament and the pramukhs of the zila parishads on the other hand. For, the jurisdiction of a zila parishad invariably coincides with an MP's constituency and that of a panchayat samiti coincides with that of an MLA's constituency. Thus at the district level there are two elected representatives of the people and so are at the panchayat samiti level who vie with one another insofar as wielding real power is concerned. And since parliament and legislative assemblies are considered to be better seats of power in the scheme of things, the pramukh of the zila parishad and the pradhan of the panchayat samiti are woefully relegated to the background. And this gives a severe blow to the cause of panchayati raj.

If we believe in the panchayati raj system, we must do all that is possible to build up the status of the important functionaries connected with the panchayati raj. The author, in this behalf, therefore, is of the view that the pradhan of the panchayat samiti should be *ex officio* MLA and the pramukh of the zila parishad should be *ex officio* MP. In other words, elections for MLAs and MPs, as such, need not at all take place.

Once this system is introduced, these MLAs and MPs will prove better than their present counterparts because in their deliberations in the houses they will have at the back of their minds the responsibilities they have to discharge as pradhans and pramukhs, respectively, and their approach will, therefore, be more practical and down-to-earth.

With their valuable experience gained in the Legislative Assemblies and Parliament, the pradhans of panchayat samitis and pramukhs of zila parishads will handle the panchayat samitis and zila parishads affairs more astutely. The standard of debate in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies is likely to register considerable improvement and so will the standard of performance of zila parishads and panchayat samitis. They will thrive on each other by admirably deriving sustenance from each other.

As a natural corollary a significant change will have to be effected in the system of elections to the post of the Prime Minister of India and Chief Ministers of States also because once the pradhans of panchayat samitis will be *ex officio* MLAs and pramukhs of zila parishads will be *ex officio* MPs, they will not be available to the nation to serve as ministers.

Therefore, ministers at the Union as also at the State levels shall have to be elected directly by the citizen voters and that is as it should be.

For contesting elections here also, instead of individuals, there should be teams. For example, if it is decided that the Union Government of India should have fifty-one ministers, the contenders for the elections should be individuals who aspire to be Prime Minister of India and they should

give out the names of fifty members of their team who would, in the event of their winning the elections, be their ministers.

Similarly, if State Governments are to have, say, twenty-one ministers each, the aspirants for the post of Chief Minister of a State should give the names of twenty of their colleagues who, in the event of their winning the elections, would be the ministers of their government. A prime minister, a chief minister and as averred above, a pramukh, a pradhan and a sarpanch, elected directly by the citizens, would have the pride and satisfaction of having the backing of the nation, State, district, tehsil (or anchal) and the panchayat area respectively. The voter will also then arguably develop a greater sense of participation in the democratic process.

In the system of election advocated in this paper the aspirants to the posts of prime minister down to the sarpanch of the panchayat shall have to distribute the subject portfolios of government (executive bodies in case of zila parishads, panchayat samitis and panchayats) to their team mates in advance. They will also have to give the names equivalent to one half of the total number of members of their team to serve on the reserve list to be banked upon in case of need.

The minister's tenure will be at the pleasure of the prime minister and chief minister and the tenure of the members of the executive bodies of the zila parishads, panchayat samitis and panchayats will be at the pleasure of the pramukh, pradhan and sarpanch as the case may be.

By way of a concluding remark on this point it may be added that the composition of the Parliament (Lok Sabha) and the Legislative Assemblies (Vidhan Sabhas), as also the three panchayati raj bodies, will in this set-up take the following shape:

Lok Sabha	: Prime Minister, fifty ministers and the pramukhs of all zila parishads of India as MPs.
Vidhan Sabha	: Chief Minister, twenty ministers and the pradhans of all panchayat samitis of the State as MLAs.
Zila Parishad	: Pramukh, four members of the executive body, pradhans of panchayat samitis (or their nominees from the executive bodies) and co-opted members.
Panchayat Samiti	: Pradhan, four members of the executive body, sarpanches of panchayats (or their nominees from the executive body) and co-opted members.
Village/Ward Panchayat	: Sarpanch, four members of the executive body, other panchas and co-opted members.

It would thus appear that neither need political parties be recognised for the purpose of these elections nor will, in all probability, there be any opposition for the sake of opposition. Instead, there are likely to be combinations for opposing particular issues of importance and this will be quite salubrious to the health of democracy in the country.

Details regarding impeachment or expression of lack of confidence in the ministers or the executive bodies and ancillary and related issues could be worked out with precision and comprehension.¹⁶

CONCLUSION : ATTITUDINAL CHANGES

Introduction of panchayati raj was hailed as "one of the more imaginative and institutional innovation made by the national leadership".¹⁷

The seeds were sown with gusto but an enumeration of the ailments of panchayati raj proves beyond any shadow of doubt that the selection of the seeds was poor and poorer still was the way the seedling and sapling were tended and nurtured.

The plant has, therefore, had a stunted growth and ultimately is on way to withering. As a pitiable consequence, even the few enthusiasts who had gathered around panchayati raj, began to get off the panchayati raj bandwagon. And the process has been so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. Our strategies must, therefore, inescapably be tailored to curing the body politic of the ailments identified and arrayed in this paper and may be many others as well. And we know that this illness, this paranoia, dangerous though it is, is not incurable. At the same time we should not be swayed by the feeling that we can catch up overnight.

The total endeavour should be in the direction of "discovering or creating a representative and democratic institution" which must evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.¹⁸ And the local leadership is potentially capable not only of coming to grips with panchayati raj problems but of finding in them new pride and purpose also.

But a lot, predictably, will depend primarily upon the helpful attitude of the government and constructive approach of the bureaucracy towards the philosophy of panchayati raj. All the rest is as easy as shooting fish in a barrel. Let there be no mistake about it.



¹⁶ Readers interested in the proposition may peruse author's article, "Democratic Government in India: New Dimensions", *Journal of Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration*, Mussoorie, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Spring 1973 issue, pp. 100-108.

¹⁷ Rajni Kothari, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁸ Principal recommendation of Balwantray Mehta Committee Report (Planning Commission, Committee on Plan Projects, Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service), New Delhi, 1957.

On Remodelling Panchayati Raj*

R.N. Haldipur

THOUGH PANCHAYATS have been in existence ever since the vedic period in one form or another, the present form of people's local government is essentially a recent creation. During the time of the British, a system of local bodies with limited powers was devised for housekeeping in response to the sentiments of a liberal group of Indians, like Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, demanding self-government. During the period of the nationalist movement, including the Gandhian era, our political behaviour and administrative performance were influenced by two major factors. On the one hand, ethical and spiritual overtones were given to political conduct by Tilak, Tagore and Gandhi while, on the other hand, the concept of permanent, neutral and generalist civil service was introduced by the British in India, thus attempting to achieve impartiality and equality before law. In order to administer law without fear or favour, the civil service conditions kept the officials beyond temptations of corruption and also insulated them from the people. The introduction of an impartial civil service, howsoever laudable in that context, became inadequate to meet the prevailing situation. The national leaders who opposed the colonial rule, however, wanted to fight deprivation of independence on moral grounds.

GRASSROOT DEMOCRACY

With the advent of freedom and the acceptance of the concept of welfare state, new challenges were posed with apparently conflicting aims. Economic growth and social justice within the framework of parliamentary democracy and secularism raised new issues, apart from giving new dimensions to the old problems. The erstwhile governmental machinery was required to effect adjustments far beyond its inherent capacity. According to Taylor and Ensminger, "the inadequacies of Indian bureaucracy are

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XVII, 1971, No. 3, pp. 527-36.

not due to the fact that it is a bureaucracy, but due to a considerable extent, to the fact that it carries too much baggage from the past".¹

To face the needs of development, it was felt necessary that people's participation should be secured in carrying out various programmes. In response to the emergent situation, which necessitated finding of new answers to various challenges, different suggestions were made. When the constitution was being framed, there was a debate as to whether it should give primacy of place to panchayati raj or village republics from which various tiers of people's representative institutions could be established to ensure grassroot democracy. However, the debate temporarily ended by providing for the establishment of village panchayats only, as contemplated in Article 40 of the chapter on Directive Principles in the Constitution. Panchayati raj, in the form and content as seen today, owes its origin to the report of the Balwantray Mehta Committee appointed by the Central Government and to a large number of other committees appointed by the State Governments to evolve and evaluate the functioning of community development programme and the structure that would be appropriate for its effective working.

DEMAND FOR AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

A decade or more has elapsed since the submission of the Balwantray Mehta report and its implementation in various States of India. In some States, these institutions have taken root and have gathered momentum, while in others, they are still in the embryonic stage. Considerable thinking on various facets and the working of the scheme has been stimulated. On one side, certain trends in Indian society are now visible—indicating a growing political consciousness and a demand for an egalitarian society in which the 'elite', not only traditional but the newly emergent too, wish to participate. There is a feeling that the developments that have taken place so far—both on the socio-economic front as well as the political—have not kept pace with time. In this context, democratic decentralisation or panchayati raj is regarded by some as an important milestone in the progress of democracy in our country. There is another group which feels that panchayati raj has introduced a new dimension in the body politic which has only helped the traditional leaders and vested interests in creating and promoting factionalism. The reactions that have been evoked have, therefore, been varied—from stark pessimism and disillusionment on one side to conviction in its efficacy and qualified optimism in its ultimate future.

The main criticism of panchayati raj has been that it has created vested interests in the rural scene, introducing a spoils system and creating factions.

¹Carl C. Taylor, Douglas Ensminger and associates, *India's Roots of Democracy : A Sociological Analysis of Rural India's Experience in Planned Development Since Independence*, Calcutta, Orient Longmans, 1965, p. 579.

While, partly, this is endemic to any developing society, it is more so in a country of our size and complexity where caste, class and history are the warp and woof of its social fabric.

In determining the jurisdiction, power and resources of the new bodies to be established for rural development, the Balwantray Mehta team recommended democratic decentralisation, at three levels. The concept of people's active participation—'power to the people'—has been elaborated as the pivot of the whole scheme. The term 'power' has been used equivocally and needs clarification for a better understanding of the processes involved. If one looks at panchayati raj as it is in operation today, one would be tempted to ask whether there has been a real transfer of power to these bodies in most of the States. Another natural query would be whether such a transfer is at all possible. After all, when one talks of power to the people, one cannot help asking as to who the people are, what one often finds is a traditional leader, a wealthy person or a leader of a socially powerful group wielding authority in the name of people.

The concept of people's participation is also clouded with ambiguities. In order that the people participate effectively, they should be able to plan for the improvement of their own lot. But are the people able to do so, on their own at this juncture of development? How many of the so-called 'felt-needs', barring the very obvious physical needs, are consciously felt and articulated? The vast majority of our people are busy, eking out a living. Neither the evidence of the aspirations of the people, without any reference to the socio-economic status and work orientation, is to be found, nor would the country benefit by captaining discontent of the people without kindling their hope.

The usual cliche is that the 'have-nots' trigger off revolutions. But this is not very true. Mere discontent is not enough to fan a desire for change. There should be some sense of power also. For perpetuation of the social order, according to Eric Hoffer, "a conservatism of the destitute is as profound as the conservatism of the privileged".² "Fear of the future causes us to lean against and cling to the present, while faith in the future renders us receptive to change."³ It is often said that, in our country, the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. It is true in a relative sense, though, during the last two decades, all classes of people have improved their lot; but this improvement had been highly conspicuous in the case of a particular section of our people who are a small minority. We have been witnessing the phenomena of sprawling cities and gaping countrysides. The position has been exacerbated by social mobility of the skilled and the educated moving to the cities and also by the mass media which are causing a feeling of deprivation amongst the rural masses, since

²Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, New York Time Incorporated, 1963, p. 8.

³Ibid., pp. 9-10.

there is a revolution of rising expectations amongst them. Hence, in some areas, we are sitting on a volcano which can erupt any time with the pressure of seething discontent of the times. A sense of deprivation of better facilities, dissatisfaction with local leadership and consciousness of the gulf between the quality of life of different sections and different areas, do cause disturbance. If an effort is made to put a lid over people's emotions, they get choked. Amongst the alternatives, one could be holding the lid down with force, and the other having an outlet through dialogue and deliberations within various pressure groups.

Nowhere in the history of civilisation does one come across a perfectly integrated society. A certain amount of discontent is symptomatic of progress and growth. But, at the same time, if we have, on one side, a revolution of rising expectations and, on the other, uneven growth which is inadequate to fulfil the immediate needs of the people, disequilibrium creeps into and disrupts the social structure causing unrest. In the course of time, there will be a growing urge on the part of the common man to get more and more out of his involvement, in the affairs of the community of which he is a part. From this angle, the U.N. report on "Measures for Economic Development for Underdeveloped Countries" has pertinently pointed out that men learn administration by participating in it. They, therefore, learn fastest in countries where self-governing institutions are most widespread. Considered from this point of view, panchayati raj bodies have a vital role to play because they provide forum for a dialogue and make possible government by consent at various levels.

POLITICISATION OF RURAL LIFE

In a country where there is a party system of government and where people are approached, with party manifestoes, for their votes during the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, politicisation of rural life is inevitable. The moot point, however, is whether we should be satisfied with a system of informal pressure groups, which impinge on local administration without accountability to the local population, or whether we should legitimize the political process by establishing panchayati raj bodies which have to seek people's mandate, from time to time, and are to some extent accountable to them. Moreover, the interaction of the traditional administrative system with the locally elected representatives is full of ambiguity, leading to general dissatisfaction amongst all. This is largely because in many areas where panchayats operate, there is no rationalisation of power, responsibility and resources of these bodies, based upon their capability to perform certain tasks at the level of their operation. The main hurdle, however, is to create, amongst the rural population, national impulses through perception of national goals and reconcile them with local aspirations. This could only be done through the panchayati raj bodies.

Some misunderstanding may partly be due to a lack of conceptual clarity about democratic decentralisation in the context of economic and political compulsions of today and the need for preservation of national unity. In this context, on one side, we have the thesis propounded by Jayaprakash Narayan,⁴ basing his views on Gandhian and sarvodaya philosophy which envisages complete transfer of power to panchayati raj institutions in matters pertaining to local development and local administration. This conjures up the image of panchayati raj as a charter of rural local government whose leaders are elected by a consensus. There is, however, a school which feels that this is not possible in a country functioning within the framework of parliamentary democracy. With the politicisation of rural areas, consensus is not possible. They feel that the ends of social justice are achieved better at the national and the state levels than at the local level, particularly in the matter of taxation. "It will not do to think poorly of the politicians and talk with bated breath about the voters. No more than the kings before them should the people be hedged with divinity."⁵ Roscoe Martin has also opposed complete transfer of power to local bodies on the ground that they would not be in a position to discharge a number of functions they may be required to do. According to him: (1) Little government is amateur, casual, often highly personal and even proprietary. If any one thinks that small rural unit governs itself democratically in practice, he has only to live in one or observe it closely over a period. (2) Little government arouses little interest in people; they may be living, geographically, in small area of 'self government'. (3) It is not free of 'politics' either. Actually, it is often ruthlessly political as a minor official often discovers to his cost. Also, little government cannot possibly perform the many services required of any government today. They are too many, and too important for the purpose; the national interest forbids them to be left to its choice and mercy.⁶

While there is some truth in what he says, to make little government bereft of all privileges and powers of handling local problems would be a greater mistake indeed. Today, we want not merely leaders and pressure groups but we want them to be accountable, responsible and also responsive to the needs of the people. This probably can come only through various tiers of local institutions made responsible to the people who select them. From that angle, panchayati raj is a most momentous venture in rural administration just as, after the first decade of British rule, introduc-

⁴Jayaprakash Narayan, "Fundamental Problems of Panchayati Raj", *Action for Rural Change—Readings on Community Development*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, pp. 148-156.

⁵Paul H. Appleby, *Citizens as Sovereigns*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1962.

⁶Roscoe C. Martin, *Grass-Roots*, Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1957 [reviewed in *The Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (July-September 1962), pp. 426-427 by Prof. V.K.N. Menon].

tion of land revenue system was one. It is not merely a new system of administration. It is creation of new levels of government. A good part of the time of state legislatures has till now been consumed in discussion of local needs, ventilation of local grievances and criticism of the functioning of the local officials. Taking local problems and individual grievances to civil servants and not infrequently to Ministers has been a conspicuous form of political activity. With the transfer of responsibilities over a wide field, from officials directly accountable to ministers, to autonomous, elected panchayati raj bodies, this situation will undergo some change. The members of the Parliament who have to think of national issues would have much more time to specialize in these areas and advise the government regarding choices and options that could be conceived. Similarly, members of the legislatures could consider the type of legislation required for the smooth functioning of the State for its progress and prosperity. No doubt, with the establishment of panchayati raj, new centres of political power and influence will come into existence. This will affect to some extent the established pattern of political leverage. But these are all checks and balances which are essential for any democratic form of government, apart from the scope it gives to people, at various levels, for effective participation in the realisation of their local goals. This also leads to a certain amount of social responsibility. A full-fledged democracy at the Centre and at the State level and a bureaucratic conveyor-belt all along the line below, would be incongruous and undesirable in the long run. "The politics of adult franchise and participation, and diffusion with decentralization of political power that it entails, would lead to both more responsive and more integrated polity."⁷

The basic concept behind establishing panchayati raj was to create rural, local-government agencies responsible for discharging certain select functions pertaining to development. It is not merely a state agency but a self-propelling institution which could mobilise its own resources, both human and material, so that development could be energised. But one must remember that this decentralisation at lower level is possible only if democracy is secured at the national level. According to Appleby :

'Democratic decentralisation' appears to suggest that decentralisation axiomatically enhances democracy,

on the other hand,

'decentralised democracy' correctly assumes that democracy has first been achieved through the establishment of a centralised governing institution designed to operate under popular control ... it may, when it is strong enough, carry on some or all of its functions through structures, which in various ways and in various degrees are more

⁷Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India*, Boston, Little Brown, 1970.

than ordinarily decentralised when this is found to be effective, desirable and not nationally debilitating.⁸

Broadly speaking, the views on democratic decentralisation could be classified into two extreme positions with a number of intermediate ones trying to synthesise them. At one extreme, it is maintained that panchayati raj institutions should be the limbs and agencies of state government and no more. Preferably, it would be better not to have such institutions as they create factions; the legislative assembly at the State level and the parliament at the national level should be adequate to preserve democracy. At the other end, it is argued that these institutions should be regarded as self-government institutions at various levels. According to Jayaprakash Narayan,

*To have gone all the trouble and expense of establishing Panchayati Raj merely in order to create new agencies of the State governments, would appear to me to have been a foolish and wasteful enterprise.*⁹

In a country of India's gigantic size and bewildering complexity, where modernity co-exists with age-old traditionalism, it is necessary to work out a strategy of development, through local-level institutions in keeping with the genius of the people and their naive wisdom.

The working of the panchayati raj, today, seems to be nowhere near the promised utopia. With poverty, destitution and illiteracy holding the rural masses in bondage, their ability to select their representatives to various bodies, with responsibility and knowledge of the consequences, still remains suspect. If the people are not made conscious of what they want and how to get it, there is no real dispersal of power. It is partially true that the voter at the grassroots remains a puppet in the hands of warring factions of the village. Panchayati raj is also accused of being responsible for violence. In this context, one may, however, note that serious unrest is prevalent, even in States where panchayati raj has not struck roots. The vigour and growth of mass-movements depend on their capacity to evoke and satisfy the passion for self-renunciation by instilling a strong sense of deprivation.

When a mass-movement begins to attract people who are interested in their individual careers, it is a sign that it has passed its vigorous stage; that it is no longer engaged in moulding a new world but in possessing and preserving the present. It ceases then to be a movement and becomes an enterprise.¹⁰

⁸Paul H. Appleby, "Some Thoughts on Decentralised Democracy", *The Indian Journal of Public Administration* (Special Number), Vol. VIII, No. 4 (October-December, 1962), p. 443.

⁹Jayaprakash Narayan, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁰Eric Hoffer, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

It is important to remember that in spite of the weaknesses of this body, it is necessary to give people a stake, particularly since the social system in which we are living is not homogeneous. There are various centres of power. If power is diffused, it would serve as checks and balances, provided their is direction from the national level. Also, the structural and cultural contradictions, which exist in our society today, need to be removed by appropriate legislation. The local bodies would then be effective instruments to probe into the aspirations of the people, find out their own resources and build a strategy of development suited to them.

STATUTORY BODIES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In this century, we are super-imposing the modern concepts of democracy, socialism and secularism on a traditional society which is based on caste, creed and religion. Therefore, we have to look at problems from the point of view of historicity. A certain amount of disturbance is bound to take place with the modernizing process and there will be a growing need for statutory bodies at the local level. These could be related to various groups, such as cooperatives, farmers' organisation, youth club, mahila mandals, etc., which, in turn, could be committees of panchayats for implementation of their respective programmes. The concept of village self-sufficiency has no room today. It is a question of interdependence which means increasing areas of contact and these have to be coordinated by a body, like the Panchayats.

Modernising forces have to enter the very heart of rural community. People should be sensitised to social responsibility and awakened to broader national requirements. As things exist, the rural masses do not have their larger perspective but restrict their vision to local needs and factional problems. To bring about this change, the States and the Central Government are hopelessly inadequate, especially in a country so vast as ours. Then, what effective alternative, can we suggest to panchayati raj to bring about this process of socialisation? In the words of Aneurin Bevan,

The whole art of local Government is to estimate catchment areas for dealing with particular services before deciding where boundaries of these services should be drawn.

Can reorganisation or remodelling the structure of our panchayati raj bodies offer a solution? We have to find out correctives and strengthen organisations at various levels. The delimitation of scope of authority of different tiers and proper coordination of local initiative and governmental assistance is necessary.

Gram Sabha

The constitution of gram sabhas is based on the assumption that the

village is and could be a self-sufficient unit consisting of a homogeneous community. This is more true in a fairy tale, considering the modern conditions where so much of inter-dependence, interaction and mobility are in evidence. On the other hand, we should also recognise the fact that the diversity of needs of various groups conflicts in the village society. To have the village as a panchayat unit would only heighten, to some extent, tensions and the fact of inter-dependence is likely to be overlooked. Sociologists, however, have pointed out that though caste, religion and politics have taken people outside the limits of a village, there is still the village-pride which often manifests itself. The problem, therefore, is how to reconcile the feeling of village-pride with the concept of inter-dependence, which is vital for growth. It is essential to activise the gram sabha, and, with this end in view, to recognise the factors, which can move the people and bring them together. These could be a concrete programme based on their real needs, the acceptance and image of the local leader or a crisis facing them. People do not like to come merely for the sake of attending a meeting and listening to a few talks by the local leaders which they are bound, in any case, to hear in the course of their day-to-day interactions.

Gram Panchayat

Just as it is important to activise the gram sabha, it is also necessary to broaden the base of the gram panchayat, so that the forces of interaction could bring villages together in a wider community, where viability will be improved. The panchayat should be located at existing or potential growth-centres, covering a group of villages which could serve as wards and act as its hinterland. It could cover a population of about six to ten thousand or so, in a cluster of about eight-to-ten villages. In the course of delimitation, one cannot ignore the inhibiting social factors and political compulsions. The gram panchayat would then be able to determine norms for viable village communities in terms of economic investments and social amenities. This will make it effective as it will be able to cater, with its greater resources, to the various sections of population, such as small or big farmers, agricultural labour, rural artisans and trademen. This would act as a point of radiation to transmit impulses to its hinterland. It should be helped with matching grants for projects contributory to the creation of community assets. The election of members to the panchayat should be done in such a way that each village is represented. Here, population need not be a criterion. (Incidentally, by making population of criterion, there is a chance of the family planning programme receiving a setback.) This kind of an arrangement is likely to cut at the root of factionalism in an individual village. Though the village factions are not corollary to panchayati raj, they vitiate the functions of the local bodies and the result is often a stalemate and inertia. The functions of the gram panchayat should essentially be the maintenance of institutions established by higher tiers and to serve as a feedback to

the levels above, in the process of planning. It is a known fact that, the 'common man' is not usually interested in plans, proformas and abstract schemes. He would like to have something tangible to handle. Most people cannot be moved by abstract ideas. They need a concrete situation to activate them. They will, however, have to be helped with planning, by the enlightened elite who even in their own interest will have to change the vast countryside and give people a new quality of life.

Panchayat Samiti

The next tier—the panchayat union council or what is known as the panchayat samiti—could consist of representatives of various gram panchayats by indirect elections so that they could be responsible and accountable to the panchayats and indirectly to the village people. The samiti whose sphere of operation could be co-extensive with that of a Taluk, should be entrusted with the responsibility of mobilisation of local resources and implementation of various schemes, depending upon the capability in terms of staff and resources that are available. It is no use giving them functions where they do not have the adequate expertise. At this stage, it may be pointed out that, at the levels of the Taluks, there is a functional dichotomy between the town and the villages around. The towns are looked after by the municipalities and, in the same headquarters, the Samiti functions looking after the villages within its jurisdiction. While care will have to be taken to demarcate the municipal area, which has its specific needs to be met, it is advisable to have a built-in interaction between the two areas, at the level of the samiti by having one of its standing committees, mainly elected from the town, being entrusted with municipal functions. This will avoid a tug-of-war between the two interests and make both grow, instead of working at cross-purposes. However, necessary financial allocations will have to be made on the basis of tax collections.

Zila Parishad

The unit of planning, however, should be the district, with the zila parishad consisting of a majority of members elected by direct elections and the rest from the panchayat samitis. The MLAs and Members of the Parliament should be associated with their respective Samitis as well as the zila parishads. The district body should be empowered to levy taxes and also collect land revenue which it should share with the lower tiers of panchayati raj bodies. While it would be desirable to continue to make the collector of the district responsible for maintenance of revenue records, the zila parishad should have an executive officer of the rank of a collector to undertake planning and coordinate developmental work. He should be assisted by a district planning officer and specialists in various fields, in order to strengthen the planning and developmental machinery. It is important to ensure that the power of the zila parishad are fairly well balanced

with those of the panchayat samiti so that the Samiti is not turned into a feeble institution, starved of initiative and purposeful development. The zila parishads should have some regulatory and advisory functions enjoined on them by statute and they should be in a position to match schemes with resources and be responsible for their enforcement. It should divest itself of some of its specific functions and transfer them to panchayat samitis, cooperatives and other voluntary organisations. We find that the existing administrative apparatus presents two problems—one is that some of the institutions have not imbibed a development concept and the other is that many organisations have overlapping powers and functions. The type of leadership available at the district level, the organising ability of the generalists and the technical know-how of the specialists are of a fairly high order to enable them to coordinate the work of these organisations and take up planning and implementation functions at the district level. The zila parishad will have a crucial role to play in galvanising the lower tiers into activity and in sustaining the tempo of development. It is also desirable to constitute a statutory body, as in existence in Gujarat consisting of the minister incharge, chairman of zila parishads and heads of departments concerned, to coordinate problems arising out of inter-district projects and to resolve conflicts.

ROLE OF THE STATE AND THE CENTRE

The role of the State Assembly should be to provide State-level legislation to bring about structural changes required for the functioning of various tiers of lower bodies and to serve as a catalytic agent for building up momentum, by regional and State planning, on the basis of the total resources available. It should also concern itself essentially with the provision of large scale infrastructure and of financial assistance to panchayati raj bodies in the form of matching grants. The panchayati raj bodies could also take up some programme on behalf of the State. After all, panchayati raj institutions are the creations of the State Governments and hence it is important for the State Governments to overview and guide, so that they could function much more effectively, by providing planning and technical inputs required by these bodies. The members of the legislatures would then have enough time to give thought to the State plans and problems, so that adequate legislative support could be given for bringing about change.

Similarly, the Centre has the vital task of framing economic and foreign policy, of looking after the defence of the country and the maintenance of law and order on a national level. Besides, it will have to provide and maintain inter-state services and inter-state collaboration. In evolving these policies, Members of the Parliament have a crucial role to play by building up expertise in various fields.

CONCLUSION

The kingpin of the movement and the main actor in the whole drama is the 'common man' on whom depends the success or otherwise of any plan or scheme, however, perfectly it is conceived. Much also depends on the involvement of workers and their commitment to programme and policies. In the ultimate analysis, people's participation has to be evoked for implementation of the programmes.

A great society needs not consensus but creative leadership and creative opposition. It needs the sting of challenge in a society rich in diversity and in a politics rich in dissent.¹¹

Here, one is reminded of what John Steinbeck has said,

I believe that all men are honest when they are disinterested. I believe that most people are vulnerable where they are interested. I believe that some men are honest in spite of interest. It seems to one reprehensible to search out areas of weakness and to exploit them.¹²

Some of us have ignored the value of panchayati raj institutions because of some shortcomings. Should we, therefore, throw the baby with the bath-water?



¹¹James MacGregor Burns, *Presidential Government : The Crucible of Leadership*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

¹²John Steinbeck, *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*.

Re-Modelling Panchayati Raj Institutions in India*

P.C. Mathur

FREE India's commitment to democracy, development and decentralisation was embodied, in a paradigmatic sense, in the panchayati raj institutions but the experience of the last one and half decade has shown the necessity of restructuring the conceptual, structural as well as functional parameters of panchayati raj which has failed to reach a 'take-off' stage despite considerable investment of political and economic resources. Even during the course of India's freedom struggle a number of prominent national leaders had advocated the revitalisation of village panchayats and after India became free, several states launched upon schemes for democratisation of local self-government. Hence, when the committee on plan projects of the National Development Council appointed a study team under the chairmanship of Shri Balwantray Mehta which came out with its now famous proposal for 'democratic decentralisation', it was enthusiastically incorporated in the emerging consensus on national development in India. However, although no less than a person than Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, free India's first Prime Minister, lent his personal support towards statutory institutionalisation of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team's proposals, panchayati raj in India did not exactly record a sustained success, mainly due to a perceptible erosion of political faith in the efficacy of democratic decentralisation both at the Union as well as the State level during the latter half of the sixties and the early seventies culminating in the unprecedented centralisation of decision-making powers during June 1975—March 1977. The establishment of the first-ever non-Congress government at the Union level dedicated to a belief in "a polity that ensures decentralisation of economic and political power" has provided yet another opportunity for re-invigoration of local self-government in India so as to make it a suitable

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXIV, 1978, No. 3, pp. 592-616. This paper is based on a working paper commissioned for the zonal seminar on restructuring of panchayati raj organised by Prof. Iqbal Narain on behalf of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions, Government of India, at the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, on March 30-31—April 1, 1978.

vehicle for democratic management of politico-economic programmes for nation-building.

The main objective of the present paper is to offer a panoramic overview of the progress and problems of panchayati raj institutions in a few selected States and Union Territories of India so that the local as well as the national policy makers may form an idea about: (i) the changes that have already taken place or are under-way, (ii) the choices available to them with regard to institutional innovations and/or structural reforms, and (iii) the chances of successful implementation of the various policies and proposals in view of the still prevailing political resistance to substantial devolution of powers, functions and resources. Since considerable literature about the empirical performance of panchayati raj institutions since 1959 already exists, no attempt is being made in the present paper to provide comprehensive data, statistical or otherwise, but the emphasis is, essentially, on policy choices open to decision-makers in a field where considerable experimentation has already been made, thus almost pre-empting the possibility of a radical renovation of either the concept or the structure of panchayati raj institutions. However, since in view of the ringing pronouncements about a 'new village movement' or 'dynamic approach to rural development' (and many other rubrics of this type) contained in the 1977 election manifesto of the Janata Party, this possibility cannot be *totally* ruled out, we have devoted a small section to discussion of a radical renovation in panchayati raj policy.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Panchayati raj in India is, essentially, an 'all-India' phenomenon, whether in conceptual or institutional terms, but along with the politico-constitutional unity, socio-cultural and politico-institutional diversity is also a fact of life in India and, hence, even such a pan-Indian structure as panchayati raj has come to exhibit certain significant variations even in such geographically proximate units as Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh which provide the area focus for our discussion of the problems and prospects of panchayati raj institutions in this paper.

At this stage it would be appropriate, in our view, to provide a 'minimal' definition of panchayati raj in order to formally differentiate it from other similar concepts and/or institutional complexes. By panchayati raj we mean a statutory multi-tier institutional structure endowed with a corporate status by a competent (State) legislature performing functions pertaining to local self-government as determined, from time to time, by the legislature and/or the executive at the State or Union levels. While to several readers such a formal definition may appear to be an exercise in futility, one would, nevertheless, like to draw the attention of national as

well as State-level policy-makers that the concept of panchayati raj as advocated by the Balwantray Mehta Study Team and institutionalised by several States after 1959 is, essentially, different from the related concepts of local government in countries like Nepal and Pakistan under the style of panchayat democracy and basic democracy, respectively. We would not like to go in for a detailed elaboration of this point as far as international comparisons go (mainly because we have adequate grounds to entertain serious doubts about the legitimacy and/or competence of the agencies which have set up panchayat democracy or basic democracy) but we would like to stress the point that the mono-tier village panchayats which were established in many States in India even before 1947 have to be clearly distinguished from the panchayati raj institutions since established as an integrated system, containing three major interlocking institutions and a number of institutional affiliates and/or associates.

The foregoing description of panchayati raj as a cluster of inter-meshing institutions needs, in fact, a detailed discussion in the context of the renewed interest in panchayati raj institutions in the wake of the appointment of the Asoka Mehta Committee by the Janata Central Government to examine the "methods of constituting the panchayati raj institutions", because, so far, informal public opinion has uncritically accepted the Government of India explanation that the reference to "village panchayats in the Article 40 of the constitution of India should also be deemed to be a reference to other tiers of panchayati raj besides the institutions carrying the statutory title of 'village panchayats' ". Article 40, as is well known, is the only Article in the entire Indian constitution to contain a reference to 'village panchayats'. But this Article refers specially and squarely to 'village panchayats' *only* and does not use any phrase (*e.g.*, 'and similar other institutions') which can be construed to refer to other institutions normally regarded as part and parcel of panchayati raj and can be interpreted to subsume zila parishads and panchayat samitis on the basis of the assumption that panchayat samitis and zila parishads are village panchayat-like bodies or are, in a word, varieties of village panchayats.

The conceptual anomaly of treating panchayat samitis and zila parishads as variants of village panchayats becomes all the more pronounced when we realise that all over India, bodies designated as village panchayats have been in operation for a very long time while the establishment of panchayat samitis and zila parishads on a statutory basis is a post-Balwantray Mehta report phenomenon. It is true that the Balwantray Mehta Study Team while making its proposals which gave birth to the panchayati raj institutions decided to integrate the pre-existing village panchayats as one of the three institutional tiers in the panchayati raj system. But a detailed perusal of the study team's recommendations clearly shows that the team was thinking in terms of institutional innovation while spelling out the structure, composition, finances and functions of panchayat samitis and zila parishads and it

was certainly far from its intention to replicate village panchayat-like bodies at the block and district levels under different names.

The distinction between institutional innovation and institutional duplication was in any case, not missed by any one of the several State legislatures which sought to statutorise the recommendations of the study team because, without any exception, all of them proceeded to institutionalise panchayati raj not under an integrate legislation encompassing all the tiers but under two statutes one dealing with village panchayats alone and the other making a provision for panchayat samitis and zila parishads. To a large extent, this 'two acts' approach towards institutionalisation of panchayati raj was simply an outcome of expediency because in nearly all States, statutes dealing with village panchayats were already in force and no State legislature saw the need for repealing an existing statute and enacting a new integrated statute to deal with all the three tiers of panchayati raj when it could make do with enactment of only one new piece of legislation providing for the establishment of panchayat samitis and zila parishads while village panchayats continued to function under their own statute with, of course, some incidental changes introduced by the new Act.

RE-ORGANISATION OF VILLAGE PANCHAYATS

The failure of the union legislature to amend Article 40 to provide an unambiguous reference to panchayat samitis and zila parishads as well as the failure of the State legislatures to enact an integrated statute encompassing all the three tiers of panchayati raj (*viz.*, village panchayats, panchayat samitis and zila parishads) are, in our opinion, only the visible symptoms of a malady lying much deeper, *viz.*, failure of the national policy makers to make a proper assessment of the status role and functional ambit of the village panchayats whose continued existence in their existing form was taken for granted even as the policy makers were giving serious thought to the area, population, role, resources and responsibilities of the newly created institutions which were interlocked with the previously existing village panchayats without making adequate provision for such an institutional integration in the context of the panchayati raj. The Asoka Mehta Committee, one hopes, will have, therefore, undertaken a systematic review of the viability and suitability of village panchayats as panchayati raj institutions and, in particular, it should have undertaken a detailed probe into the necessity of continuing with the policy of statutorisation of panchayati raj institutions under two statutes, one dealing exclusively with village panchayats which enjoy the protection of Article 40 and which can be extended to the other tiers (operating under a separate statute) only by an act of interpretative elasticity.

The question, then, conceptually as well as structurally, before us is simple: Is village panchayat a panchayati raj institution? Since radical

changes are ruled out, an affirmative answer should be taken for granted, but it would still be pertinent to make a systematic assessment of the choices available regarding the re-modelling of village panchayats so as to raise the synergy of the multi-tier institutional structure of panchayati raj. In this context, one has to remember that this exercise is necessary because neither the Balwantray Mehta Study Team nor the two dozen and odd study teams appointed by the various State Governments have undertaken a comprehensive reorganisation of village panchayats in order to fit them into the overarching (village-to-district) structure of panchayati raj which was institutionalised in the wake of the proposals made by the Balwantray Mehta Study Team. The consequences of incorporating the pre-existing village panchayats into the newly-instituted panchayati raj structure have, unfortunately, not been subjected to rigorous analysis, but there is enough evidence to show that the progress of panchayati raj in India has been considerably hampered on account of the imbalances and mal-integration between the two.

In the first place, the more existence of statutory village panchayats has damped the intellectual enthusiasm of policy makers towards the institutionalisation of panchayati raj because panchayati raj is often confused (or regarded as synonymous) with village panchayats which: (a) exist, and (b) exist in a 'survivalistic' rather than a 'developmental' sense. One of the main objective of the introduction of the three-tier panchayati raj structure was, in our opinion, the re-invigoration of the time-honoured institution of village panchayats which had, in the context of modern India, at any rate, become moribund institutions eking out an anaemic existence at local levels without attracting popular participation from below or developmental devolution of resources from above. The introduction of panchayati raj, in other words, did not change much as far as village panchayats were concerned and even the synergistic benefits of being welded into a multi-tier organ of democratic decentralisation have not yet percolated to the village panchayats while there is some empirical evidence to suggest that the deficiencies and maladies afflicting the village panchayats have been 'escalated' on to the higher tiers of panchayati raj. Thus, while nearly 100 per cent rural settlements as well as 100 per cent rural population of India have been covered by village panchayats, several States have shown reluctance in the establishment of the three-tier panchayati raj structure (e.g., Jammu & Kashmir and Kerala) while even in those States where panchayati raj institutions have been established, not much thought has been given to streamlining the institutional structure of village panchayats after the introduction of panchayati raj.

Thus, to take up a very important conceptual question pregnant with great practical choices, there has been virtually no debate on the merits of the policy of 'one village one panchayat' (one village one panchayat policy) which has resulted in proliferation of village panchayats with weak

developmental capabilities. The average population of village panchayats in the U.P. panchayati raj structure is 1,030 and quite a large number of village panchayats serve the needs of a much smaller population with many village panchayats having a population of less than 500. The average population per village panchayat in Punjab is, roughly, 1,000 while Rajasthan and Haryana which seem to have departed from the one village one panchayat policy, to some extent at least have a much higher average, viz., 2,550 and 2,026, respectively. While the one village one panchayat policy has, no doubt, a great built-in potential for democratisation of panchayati raj it would be quite appropriate to try to re-examine the 'trade-off' between the democratic representatives of small village panchayats and their developmental capabilities specially in the light of the Janata Party manifesto's promise to enhance the representational capacity of higher units like districts and blocks by reducing their size. In any case, even at present very few States are rigorously following the one village one panchayat policy and, therefore, a re-examination of the criteria for constituting village panchayats in the panchayati raj context should not be considered a major change from the ongoing policies.

Restructuring of panchayati raj should, in other words, start from the bottom with a view to making the village panchayat an operational unit for popular representation as well as planned development. It would, of course, be very difficult to lay down any rigid formula for determining the area and population of the reorganised panchayats because of physical and human variations in different parts of India (the sparsely populated hilly area of Himachal Pradesh and the arid zones of Rajasthan cannot be obviously treated at par with the river-fed plains of U.P.), but, it would be worthwhile to consider the possibility of fixing the number of members in such bodies, on an all-India basis, at five. At present most panchayati raj Acts provide that the number of membership can vary between five to nine and it would not be a radical departure from the existing policies if the number of panchayat members is pegged, on an all-India basis, at five including the presiding member, i.e., *sarpanch*. Without making a radical change from the existing reality, this step would have a far reaching symbolic impact because, literally, *panchayat* implies a 'council of five' and pegging the membership of panchayati raj-panchayats to five would link them meaningfully with historical and social traditions. We would further like to suggest that the existing practice of coopting representatives of women and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes should be done away with because at this level such cooption hardly confers any representational or developmental benefits to the panchayats as such or the panchayati raj as a whole, because during the last one and a half decades hardly any such coopted member has made his/her mark on the working of panchayati raj institutions. Doing away with cooption at the panchayat level would leave the five member panchayat in direct contact with the people and if these bodies continue to

neglect the interest of large sections of their electorate some other long-term and wide-ranging solutions would be needed than the token presence of hand-picked representatives of these sections.

Another important issue on the agenda of structural reforms of panchayati raj is the question of the number of tiers in the panchayati raj system. *Prima facie*, this is a non-issue inasmuch as the Balwantray Mehta Study Team's proposal for a three-tier structure has received national endorsement but, in practice, one comes across several variations. Thus, apart from States where only one tier, *viz.*, village panchayats, exist, several States (*e.g.*, West Bengal) have been experimenting with four-tier structures while some others have reverted to a two-tier model after having introduced a full-fledged three-tier structure. The case of Haryana is most notable in this regard because it had inherited a three-tier system from Punjab in 1966 but in 1973 the Haryana Government took a step which at least academic scholars like Ranbir Singh and M. Shiviah have described as 'sudden' and abolished the apex tier, *viz.*, zila parishads. Earlier, the U.P. Government had resorted to a whole sale supersession of the zila parishads on March 23, 1970 reducing panchayati raj virtually to a two-tier structure for nearly four years.

Leaving aside these concrete cases, the utility of a three-tier structure is being increasingly questioned on the ground that while the essentiality of a village panchayat is self-evident (ensure representational democracy at the grassroots level) the case for retention of two tiers above it becomes weak because only one of these tiers can be treated as the focal structure for devolution of powers, functions and resources while the other can, at best, play an advisory role. The Balwantray Mehta Study Team had suggested that the panchayat samiti should be the focus for devolution of executive authority while the zila parishad should play the role of an adviser and coordinate the activities of panchayat samitis both among themselves as well as with the State Government. Rajasthan, the first State to introduce panchayati raj, faithfully implemented this model but Maharashtra made a departure by treating the zila parishad as the pivot of panchayati raj, relegating the panchayat samiti to a merely advisory or agency role. For some time the merits and demerits of the two models of panchayati raj were keenly debated, but, mainly because the Maharashtra model received a far better 'press', gradually even the Rajasthan policy makers began to favour the Maharashtra model as evident from the Girdharilal Vyas Committee recommendations which sought to endow the zila parishads with greater executive authority.

In the ultimate analysis, the debate between the Rajasthan and Maharashtra models of panchayati raj is, of course, a functional question rather than a structural debate because the issue refers to the viability of the block-level panchayat samiti as an areal unit for planned development. The proponents of the Maharashtra model of panchayati raj tend to regard the

zila parishad as the fulcrum of the panchayati raj system because, under the existing circumstances, the districts are far better equipped to handle a larger number of developmental functions, but this is not necessarily true for all the States in many of which district boards and other district level administrative agencies are not so developed as to provide a strong argument in favour of selecting the district level panchayati raj institution as the pivot of the panchayati raj system. Given the Janata Party's electoral pledge to redraw the boundaries of the existing blocks and districts, all arguments based on *status quo* or existing realities lose much of their force and we may have to make a fresh choice both in functional and structural terms, between the panchayat samiti and the zila parishad, as the focal unit of the panchayati raj system. The 232 panchayat samitis of Rajasthan, all the available evidence tends to suggest, have chalked up an impressive record of developmental dynamism in spite of their initial handicaps and the increasing tendency, specially during the late sixties and early seventies, of the State Government to allow the batteries of the panchayati raj institutions to run down. As mentioned earlier, even the official policy makers had grown disenchanted with the Rajasthan model so that a high-powered committee appointed by the Government of Rajasthan under the chairmanship of Shri Girdharilal Vyas, the then President of the Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee, recommended a definite shift towards the adoption of the Maharashtra model of zila parishad, but we may abandon the automaticity of belief in the efficacy of the Maharashtra model of panchayati raj and re-examine the original proposals of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team with regard to making the panchayat samiti the executive spearhead of the panchayati raj system in the light of the empirical evidence collected during the last one and a half decades, and arrive at a considered judgment about the functional viability of panchayat samiti as a vehicle for rural development. In case one comes out in favour of the Maharashtra model of panchayati raj, one will have to give serious thought to the advisability of retaining the panchayat samiti on a statutory status and in this sense even the structural issue of the number of tiers in the panchayati raj system can by no means be regarded as closed.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF GRAM SABHA ACTIVISATION

A structural issue related to the question of reorganisation of village panchayats and re-determination of the number of institutional tiers in the panchayati raj system is the question of the status of *gram sabha* and its role and responsibilities. In nearly all States where panchayati raj institutions are in operation, an attempt has been made to institutionalise the *gram sabha*, but it has been given a statutory status in only some cases and even these have given it only a semi statutory status by making an indirect provision in the status pertaining to the village panchayats while the statute

making provision for the other panchayati raj institutions makes no reference to *gram sabha* at all. The *gram sabha* in a sense ante-dates the introduction of panchayati raj and is, generally speaking, regarded as an instrument of direct democracy rather than representative democracy, because the panchayat statutes in nearly all the cases provide that the activities of the village panchayats shall be reviewed by meetings of all the adult residents of the villages falling within the jurisdiction of a village panchayat. In some States the role and status of the *gram sabha* have been formalised and incorporated in the form of rules and bye-laws making provision for the convening and conduct of such meetings at least twice a year but even in such States, e.g., Rajasthan, the *gram sabha* has yet to emerge as an institutional organ of direct democracy, mainly because the *sarpanch* (or, for that matter, the *panchas*) is not interested in regular convening of such meetings and the people do not find it worthwhile to pay the costs (in terms of money as well as energy) involved in going to attend such meetings where neither substantive issues are discussed nor implementable decision can be arrived at. For all practical purposes, therefore, the *gram sabha* is neither a full-fledged panchayati raj institution involved in democratic self-management of local level developmental plans and projects nor a viable institution of direct democracy providing a regular forum for articulation of all shades of interests, opinions and grievances at the grassroots. To be sure, we are not suggesting for a moment that local level democracy is an impossibility and we are fully confident that given a modicum of political and administrative resolution, the *gram sabha* can be activated as an effective forum for review of the general policies and overall progress of the village panchayats, but we would like to assert that the developmental role of the *gram sabha* is likely to remain severely restricted even if its representational capabilities are exploited to the fullest extent—a goal which appears to be almost impossible to achieve at least in the immediate future. One will have, therefore, to give serious attention not only to the strengthening of the administrative arrangements for regular convening and orderly conduct of *gram sabha* meetings but will have also to take into account the energy drain on account of officials' (and non-officials') preoccupation, twice a year at least, with the organisation of such meetings whose direct contribution to the development administration can only be marginal whatever be the long range gains in terms of participatory democracy.

Activation of *gram sabhas*, as mentioned earlier, is certainly not an insuperable problem (given a sustained expenditure of energy and money by the district administrative machinery plus a couple of amendments in the panchayati raj statutes making it obligatory upon the *sarpanches* and the *panchas* to attend the *gram sabha* meetings), but the question that one would like to ask after taking into account the Rajasthan experience of '*gram sabha* activation', is whether the net gain from this structural strengthening would be positive in terms of functional efficiency specially when the 'costs' of

organising six-monthly meetings are likely to increase on account of the formation of multiple village panchayats and because the average population of adult residents in each village panchayat is likely to rise in the foreseeable future. Against the above mentioned 'costs-of-democracy' argument one can, of course, put up an impassioned plea based upon absolutisation of democracy and insist that panchayati raj would remain not only incomplete but meaningless if it does not allow the people to articulate their 'voice' in face-to-face village assemblies and, at a purely conceptual level, there could be no answer to this line of argument, but then there should be as thorough a cost-benefit analysis as possible of the institutionalisation of *gram sabha* as a statutory component of the panchayati raj system before making up our mind on this issue.

ROLE OF NYAYA PANCHAYATS

A similar seemingly structural but essentially conceptual issue relates to the question of engrafting *nyaya panchayats* on the institutional structure of panchayati raj. *Nyaya panchayats* are, essentially, adjudicative bodies and their relationship with the panchayati raj system is a legacy of the pre-panchayati raj history of village panchayats when the village panchayats were invested with some judicial powers also which were later on vested in a separate statutory institution known as *nyaya panchayat*. *Nyaya panchayats* generally try petty cases arising out of civil and criminal law and have no representational or developmental role to play as far as the panchayati raj institutions are concerned. Moreover, the experience of the working of *nyaya panchayats* has been, generally speaking, unhappy and they are being gradually wound up in nearly all the States where they were established. Once again, we are confronted with a situation in which 'acteal failure' may not be considered as good enough to offset the case for 'possible success' because the dismal performance of *nyaya panchayats* cannot negate the ideal of ensuring speedy and cheap justice to people and it is difficult to refute the thesis that justice can be expedited (and made cheaper) only when it is administered at local levels by people familiar with the local situations and capable of harmonising the conflicting interests which tend to get aggravated when taken to far away courts functioning in an unknown idiom and administering an almost alien code of conduct. The gulf between the 'ideal' and the 'real' is, thus, vast and one would be faced with a very difficult problem with regard to specification of the role and status of *nyaya panchayats* in the panchayati raj system, but we would like to suggest that before making any choice(s) in this regard one must consider the larger question as to whether *nyaya panchayats* ought to be treated as an integral component of the panchayati raj system geared towards developmental goals, rather than representational and judicial.

Another structural question that deserves careful consideration is the

issue of inter-institutional linkages with special reference to the powers of control and supervision of one panchayati raj institution over the other panchayati raj institutions. The Balwantray Mehta Study Team had suggested a three-tier structure with an interlocking membership in the sense that all the presiding members of the village panchayats should be *ex-officio* members of the panchayat samiti in which the village panchayats are located and, *mutatis mutandis*, all the presiding members of the panchayat samiti should become *ex-officio* members of the zila parishads. While many such as Maharashtra, have departed considerably from these proposals, several States, most notably Rajasthan, have faithfully institutionalised what we have elsewhere characterised as the escalator model of panchayati raj in which it was possible for a *sarpanch* to become a member of the panchayat samiti and, upon being elected *pradhan* of the panchayat samiti, becoming a member of the zila parishad and even being elected as the *pramukh* of this institution. In practice, very few such cases of escalation have occurred, but the escalator model of inter-institutional linkages certainly has facilitated continuous coordination between the village panchayats and the panchayat samitis on the one hand and panchayat samitis and the zila parishads on the other since each panchayat samiti contained a large contingent of *sarpanchas* and each zila parishad had a large contingent of panchayat samiti *pradhans* as members.

While Rajasthan has successfully operated the escalator model of inter-institutional linkages, Punjab and Haryana have opted for a variation of the Maharashtra model wherein the presiding members of the lowest tier, *viz.*, the village panchayats are not *ex-officio* members of the middle tier, *viz.*, the panchayat samiti, but all the members of the village panchayat elect a fixed number (sixteen in the actual case) of representatives from amongst themselves as members, of the panchayat samiti; but all the presiding members of the panchayat samiti are *ex-officio* members of the zila parishad. We are not aware of any comparative study which sought to assess the relative merits and demerits of these two modes of inter-institutional linkages, but on a *priori* grounds, the superiority of the Punjab-Haryana model over the Rajasthan model is doubtful because it calls upon the *panchas* and *sarpanchas* of the village panchayats to participate in a 'one shot' election of sixteen persons from amongst themselves at a time when they may not be in a position to make rational political judgments about the candidates seeking their votes who, moreover, upon being elected, would have no occasion to maintain any contact with their electors in any formal sense because the *panchas* and *sarpanchas* of the village panchayats, falling in a given panchayat samiti, neither form a homogeneous political constituency nor constitute a stable electoral college.

The Rajasthan model of giving the panchayat samiti membership to all *sarpanchas* does lead to some undesirable enhancement of the status of the *sarpanchas* *vis-a-vis* the other *panchas* of his own village panchayat, but the

Punjab-Haryana model of calling upon all the newly elected *panchas* and *sarpanchas* to meet together to elect sixteen persons from amongst themselves as members of the panchayat samiti does not appear to be founded in any rational political theory, but is simply a convenient device to keep down the membership of the panchayat samiti to a manageable size and yet give the members of the village panchayats a sense of involvement in the panchayat samiti.

PITFALLS OF THE ESCALATOR MODEL

If we accept the suggestion for reduction in membership of the village panchayats to five, the logistics of holding the elections for village panchayat representatives of the panchayat samiti would certainly become more manageable, but the political rationale for such election will still remain vague and elusive. A detailed empirical probe in this regard is necessary before prescribing the preferred mode of inter-institutional linkages specially because, as hinted earlier, the Rajasthan model or the escalator model is not entirely free from defects arising out of overweightage being given to the presiding members of one institution in another institution which is also expected to exercise certain powers of control and supervision *vis-a-vis* the individuals who have been given *ex-officio* membership in the supervisory institution. Conferment of *ex-officio* membership upon *sarpanchas* (in the panchayat samitis) and *pradhans* (in the zila parishads) tends to create in the panchayat samitis as well as zila parishad a solid block of like-minded persons with strong cementing boards of common interests (in institutional terms at any rate) and instances are not lacking when all the *sarpanchas* or *pradhans* have united against all other categories of members in *panchayat samitis* and zila parishad respectively. While the formation of such *sarpanchas* or *pradhans* blocks or lobbies is merely a political and not a structural issue, the presence of *sarpanchas* in panchayat samitis and *pradhans* in zila parishads can (and, indeed, does) become a liability in the proper discharge of the powers of the control and supervision vested in the panchayat samitis and zila parishads specially in cases involving one or more *sarpanchas* or *pradhans* because they happen to be members of the body exercising control and supervision over themselves as well as their peers.

In actual practice the *ex-officio* membership of persons against whom control and supervision is being directed in the body which is responsible for maintaining control and supervision does not create any legal problems on account of well-established procedural conventions regarding such matters. But the issue that we are highlighting refers to the larger question of institutional autonomy and institutional loyalty when a given institution contains a large number drawn from a different institution to which they, moreover, owe their primary loyalty. A *sarpanch* is, all said and done, likely to always mould his preferences, priorities and programmes keeping

in view the constituency which elected him (and to which he would have to go again for re-election) and it would be a logical corollary of this political reality to expect all the *sarpanchas* to give primacy to the interests of the village panchayats even at the expense of the interests of the panchayat samiti as a whole and, hence, no one should be surprised to find that the non-*sarpanchas* (in case of panchayat samitis) and non-*pradhans* (in the case of zila parishads) are not in a position to resist the erosion of institutional autonomy from within by a group of *ex-officio* members acting in concert. The gravity of erosion of system autonomy by sub-system pressures can be realised from the fact that whenever a zila parishad or panchayat samiti is called upon to allocate resources amongst their constituent units they invariably distribute such allocable funds equally amongst all the constituent units without making an effort to discover a formula for more efficient allocation of resources because the presence of the *ex officio* presiding members of the recipient institutions virtually rules out rational choices and optimising exercises.

Having elaborated some of the key issues in organisational reform of panchayati raj institutions, we now turn to a discussion of the functional agenda of panchayati raj.

FUNCTIONAL SPAN AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

Notwithstanding Shri Asoka Mehta's disclosure at the seminar on panchayati raj, planning and democracy held at Jaipur in 1964 that the panchayati raj institutions were conceived in the Planning Commission during discussions of land reforms when the need was felt for "reorganisation of land tenure systems, of administration and of the whole social structure", the academic as well as political activist generally regard the panchayati raj institutions as the spearhead of planned development in rural India and the Balwantry Mehta Study Team has clearly mentioned in its report that its terms of reference underwent a sea-change when the National Development Council directed the team to carry out a special investigation into the question of reorganisation of district administration keeping in view the recommendation of the second five year plan for organically linking the village panchayats with popular organisations at a higher level so that the entire general and development administration at district and sub-district levels could be entrusted to such democratic institutions.

With due respect to the Balwantry Mehta Study Team, their famous proposals for 'democratic decentralisation' can be regarded as nothing but a structural institutionalisation of the recommendations of the second five year plan on the issue of reorganisation of district administration so as to adapt it to the needs of democratic planning contained in chapter VII, specially paragraphs 25 to 29, as explicitly stated in Shri V.T. Krishnamachari's letter asking the Balwantry Mehta Study Team to "study the problems

connected with reorganisation of district administration on the basis of general conclusions outlined in the second plan".

Panchayati raj institutions in India, thus, grew out of the Planning Commission's felt-need for democratisation of the planning process in general and development administration in particular and, whatever be their structural design, democratic management of local development still looms large upon their functional agenda. The Balwantray Mehta Study Team had, indeed, gone so far in its enthusiasm for democratic decentralisation of planned development that after spelling out the functions of the panchayat samitis it went on to record the following recommendation : "We would strongly urge that, except where the panchayat samiti is not in a position to function in any particular matter, the State Government should not undertake any of these or other development functions in the block area." In actual practice, no State Government was willing to pass such a self-denying ordinance in favour of its own subordinate creations and, to make the matters worse, whatever functional decentralisation did take place in the early sixties was substantially eroded, with the result that panchayati raj institutions today are virtually back to their pre-1947 status as organs of local self-governments rather than agencies for local development. This, of course, should not be taken to imply that decentralisation of development administration has been given up as a national policy, but there is no doubt that none of the State Governments in India is equally sincere when it comes to the issue of democratisation of the process of development planning at local levels by giving progressively greater weightage to the popularly elected panchayati raj institutions.

Conceived as local level organs of democratic management of development administration in particular and planned development, in general, the panchayati raj institutions are being systematically elbowed out of their main functional arena not only by the State Governments (whose technical departments are reluctant to delegate the execution of their schemes and projects to panchayati raj officials and non-officials) but also by a host of special purpose organisations (SPOs) chartered to execute specific programmes for the benefit of specified target groups. Thus, whereas the Balwantray Mehta Study Team wanted even the State Government to divest itself of all developmental responsibilities once the panchayati raj institutions were established, today one finds the panchayati raj institutions in most States in a state of standstill as far as development works are concerned while a number of SPOs are coming up for formulation and execution of development projects. Generally speaking, these SPOs do not maintain even a token linkage with the all purpose panchayati raj institutions. The establishment of Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFADAs) is only one of the numerous examples of bypassing of panchayati raj institutions by newly established uni-functional agencies and we will have to address ourselves squarely to the question whether the popularly elected all-purpose bodies

like the panchayati raj institutions can discharge their developmental responsibilities as efficiently as the uni-functional agencies specially set up to execute a specific set of schemes and projects.

There is also the broader issue of the technical or technological capability of the elective institutions dominated by a changing set of office-holders whose short-term political (and personal) interests are likely to militate against efficient management of long range development plans. As long as the present pattern of preparation of long term country wide plans (whether of the five years or rolling variety) is retained and so long as the responsibility for the execution of such plans is primarily, cast on the Union and State Governments, the chances of panchayati raj institutions emerging as agencies of local development in their own right are not only slight but very remote. The experience of various State Governments with different exercises in 'planning from below' has already convinced them that the panchayati raj institutions cannot be expected to play an effective role even in plan formulation and, hence, it would be naive to expect the State Governments to associate the panchayati raj institutions with the tasks of plan-execution for which the panchayati raj institutions are, in any case, ill-equipped, possessing neither the requisite financial resources nor the essential technical apparatus except what the State Government may spare from time to time depending upon their own techno-economic status and their political conception of the need for assisting potentially rival centres of political power.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AND PANCHAYATI RAJ

The fact that the panchayati raj institutions were able to play a significant role in the early sixties should not lead one to make over estimates about the institutional utility of panchayati raj in the sphere of development administration because these bodies started with the techno-economic endowment bequeathed by the community development programme (CDP) which was itself developing as a special purpose organisation (SPO) when it was entrusted to the care of the PRIs. Hence, as long as the CDP funds, projects and personnel were at the disposal of the panchayati-raj institutions they were able to play an active role as agencies of local development, but as soon as the CDP resources began to taper (the CDP was designed to gradually taper out over a period of 10 to 12 years but, in fact, its resources were subjected to mid-term cuts and drawbacks both by the Union and State Governments) the PRIs found themselves denuded of funds and personnel as exemplified by the 1967 decision of the Rajasthan Government to withdraw the RAS officers who were posted as *vikas adhikaris* in the 232 panchayat samitis and whose presence lent a great deal of authority and prestige to the panchayati raj institutions in a way that could never be matched by non-RAS *vikas adhikaris*. Again the 1969-70 decision of the

National Development Council to adopt the block-grant system of financial assistance to the States did, no doubt, result in a greater flexibility to the States, but at least in the case of Rajasthan, the Girdharilal Vyas Committee has clearly recorded that community development and panchayati raj were the first casualties of the adoption of this system because the State Government drastically reduced the resources it was committed to make available to the panchayati raj institutions giving rise to a large quantity of what the Vyas Committee has termed as 'minus balances' for whose *accrual* the panchayati raj institutions are still waiting.

The functional momentum of panchayati raj institutions is, thus, bound to decline further as the CDP resources are finally exhausted but, in the meanwhile, the functional primacy of multi-functional panchayati raj institutions is being increasingly challenged by the new unifunctional agencies charged with execution of technology-intensive schemes and projects. The involvement of the panchayati raj institutions with the green revolution projects, *viz.*, distribution of inputs was minimal and now the increasing adoption of World Bank promoted Bennore model of extension services is likely to result in the village level workers (VLWs) being placed outside the purview of the panchayati raj institutions. Under the CDP, the VLW was to be a multipurpose extension worker but 80 per cent of his energies were to be devoted to agriculture and when the CDP was handed over to the panchayati raj institutions the services of the VLWs were also placed at their disposal. The adoption of the Bennore model for organisation of extension services would, however, result in the VLW being again placed under the agriculture department and being converted into a 100 per cent agricultural extension worker thus leaving the village panchayats without any extension personnel of its own and depriving the panchayat samiti extension staff of the services of an active field-worker.

While it is too early as yet to assess the impact of withdrawal of VLWs on the panchayati raj institutions in Rajasthan, we will have to give serious thought to the long-term implications of the policy of taking away the responsibility for extension work from the panchayati raj institutions and entrusting it either to the State Government and its technical departments or to the new specially created agencies after by-passing the panchayati raj institutions. The Janata Government has, for example, recently adopted an industrial policy resolution which lays considerable emphasis on dispersal of industries and specially calls for the establishment of industrial services centres at district headquarters, but it makes no mention about the possible association and/or involvement of the panchayati raj institutions in the organisation and management of the proposed district industries service centres. Having been left out on the periphery of the green revolution and agricultural development during the sixties and seventies, the panchayati raj institutions are likely to be left high and dry during the eighties as the various plans for rural industrialisation get under way even though in States

like Rajasthan an attempt was made to utilise the panchayati raj institution as a vehicle for development of rural industries by creating the post of industries extension officer at the panchayat samiti level in the early sixties.

The question of the functional efficacy of the panchayati raj institutions is, of course, intertwined with the issue of resources placed at their disposal and the prospects in this regard appear to be bleak at least in the near future, as neither are the State Governments likely to enhance the quota of resources they are already devolving upon the panchayati raj institutions nor are the panchayati raj institutions likely to undertake the political risks involved in resource mobilisation on a large scale. The problems of resource mobilisation by the panchayati raj institutions have been studied by a large number of committees and study teams including the Santhanam Committee on Panchayati Raj Finances (1963) and the solutions canvassed by them have been given a trial in various States, but the total quantum of tax and non-tax revenues of the panchayati raj institutions has not shown an appreciable growth because the panchayati raj institutions, being very close to the grass-roots, do not want to incur the odium of collecting large revenues from the people. This means that either the Union Government or the State Governments would have to undertake the task of resource mobilisation on behalf of the panchayati raj institutions for a long time to come and this also means that the panchayati raj institutions will continue to depend upon grants and grants-in-aid from the State Governments because the Union Government cannot enter into direct financial transactions with the panchayati raj institutions which are treated, for this purpose, as organs of local self-government (rather than local-level agencies of rural development) which fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the State list of the Constitution of India.

The terms of reference of the Asoka Mehta Committee require it to suggest measures for reorganising the panchayati raj systems to enable the panchayati raj institutions to play an effective role in the sphere of integrated rural development in the future but no such measure stands a chance of being successful unless the extractive capabilities of the panchayati raj system are enhanced to enable the panchayati raj institutions to mobilise more resources through their own efforts. It is, however, difficult to itemise the measures to raise the resource mobilisation capability of the panchayati raj institutions specially when even the Union and State Governments are being chary of undertaking such efforts as evident from the failure, so far, to implement an effective measure for taxation of agricultural incomes. The panchayati raj institutions can, of course, bring about substantial increments in their operational funds by resorting to mobilisation of non-tax revenues on a large scale specially in the sphere of undertaking productive or remunerative enterprises whose outputs can be sold or rented on a commercial basis. This would, however, immediately raise the question of 'social justice' and critics may very well question the desirability of panchayati raj institutions

launching upon profit making activities when they are expected to fulfil the minimum needs of the rural masses. In recent years, rural India has seen a marked expansion in commercial transactions (even the quantum of credit operations has gone up tremendously) and panchayati raj institutions can certainly mobilise a lot of resources for development activities by, say, undertaking to provide techno-economic services to the rural people, but, whether by policy or by an oversight, the panchayati raj institutions have been virtually excluded from launching upon such enterprises and, instead of utilising the panchayati raj institutions as local-level agents for handling such techno-economic goods and services, the State Governments have preferred to establish State-level statutory corporations (*e.g.*, agro-industries corporations) to handle these remunerative enterprises. We may have, therefore, to re-examine the role and status of the panchayati raj institutions *vis-a-vis* such State-level organisations (with State wide operations) and suggest some concrete measures to enable the panchayati raj institutions to participate in their remunerative operations which not only deprive the panchayati raj institutions of local non-tax revenues but also lower their political and administrative prestige as the people increasingly find that the panchayati raj institutions have no role to play in distribution of goods and services which command a great premium in rural development. Most panchayati raj statutes in India, for example, provide full or associate membership to representatives of cooperative institutions in the panchayati raj institutions but no State Government has thought it worthwhile to affiliate the panchayati raj institutions with remunerative organisations operating in rural areas and measures need to be taken indeed, for bringing about a greater institutional integration between the all-purpose panchayati raj institutions and the host of newly established unifunctional agencies because such measures could go a long way towards improving their functional span if not the financial status of the panchayati raj institutions.

POLITICAL ISSUES AND ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONALISATION

All the foregoing suggestions (and discussions about the pros and cons of the suggestions) about structural renovations and functional reinvigoration of the panchayati raj institutions would remain sterile without taking into account the political factors impeding or facilitating the working of the panchayati raj institutions. The importance of the political factor is often not fully realised because 'politics' operates slowly and subtly and policy makers take it for granted that the legal formal institutional structures devised by them can withstand the political stresses and strains without much difficulty of deviation from the original plan. Another factor which impedes a rational analysis of political choices is the lack of relevant criteria for making political judgments, as evident from the candid confession of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team that "we are not able to suggest

any arrangement" to ensure the "complete freedom to exercise the right of adult franchise without the possibility of creating tensions which aggravate village feuds and caste differences". Great as the urgency is to ensure that the panchayati raj institutions operate in a 'healthy' political manner and atmosphere, it is clear that the arena of 'politics' is the least susceptible to rational choices and the chances of any given reform cannot be assessed with any great accuracy in advance. Yet the experience of the working of the panchayati raj institutions over the last one and a half decades has thrown up certain posers and problems and are being highlighted from this point of view.

The first issue that needs a sustained discussion is the lack of political will on the part of the Union and State level elite to part with their own powers in order to ensure maximal delegation of powers and resources to the panchayati raj institutions. During the long course of the freedom struggle in India a strong consensus had seemingly crystallised round the necessity and utility of developing local self-government as people's representative institutions of grassroots democracy, but after India's attainment of independence this consensus almost evaporated despite the fact that India had opted for democratic planning in which the local institutions could have found a significant role to play and which was duly recognised by the national elite whether in the Union Cabinet or in the Planning Commission. The reluctance of the State level elite to share their powers with their local level counterparts, however, appears to be an inexplicable phenomenon specially when viewed against the pre-1947 pronouncements of the political activists who were asking the British to quit India on the ground that Indians were quite capable at self-government at all levels. As yet, we do not have detailed quantifiable data to pinpoint the State elite's reluctance for carrying out the process of decentralisation of powers, functions and resources further downwards but the cavalier manner in which different State legislatures treated the panchayati raj statutes gives some idea of the obstacles that any proposal for strengthening of the panchayati raj institutions is bound to encounter. Thus, the U.P. Vidhan Sabha took more than one year to enact the Kshetra Samitis and Zila Parishads Act while the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha rushed through the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act leaving many clauses vague and incomplete and giving rise to many legal complexities and technicalities only some of which were highlighted by Shri P.K. Chaudhuri, himself an MLA at that time, in an academic forum (*viz.*, the *Economic and Political Weekly*) of all the places ! The State legislators have, in general, not taken a very keen interest in fostering the development of panchayati raj institutions and in many cases they have been more inclined to discuss the affairs of urban local self-government institutions rather than trying to ensure healthy development of newly created panchayati raj institutions. The legislators' apathy towards panchayati raj institutions became very pronounced when they failed to lodge a combined protest in

States where panchayati raj elections were not held for more than ten years and one could discern, at least in the case of Rajasthan, the legislators' fear of emergence of the panchayati raj institutions in general and the panchayat samitis in particular as an alternative focus of political patronage and, hence, political power. It is instructive to consider, in this regard, the fate of the All-India Panchayat Parishad (AIPP) and its State level affiliates which for a brief time tried valiantly to champion the cause of panchayati raj institutions and began to function as an active 'pressure group' articulating the demand for greater delegation of powers, functions and responsibilities to the panchayati raj institutes. As a watchdog of the interests of the panchayati raj institutions, the AIPP was heavily dependent upon grants from the Union and State Governments since the panchayati raj institutions were in no position to make more than a token contribution to its funds and the flow of funds from the Government (specially State-level Government sources) began to show a perceptible decline as the AIPP became more strident in this regard. The AIPP grants had begun to register a decline even in the last days of Jawaharlal Nehru but after his death they were subjected to larger cuts and within two years of his demise many such grants were withdrawn altogether. The steep cut virtually coincided with Shri S.K. Dey's exit from the relevant Union Ministry and Shri Dey later epitomised his anxiety and depression at the turn of events by putting a question mark after the title of his book *Power to the People* containing his assessment of India's experiments with decentralised democracy. On account of a remarkable 'change-chain' unleashed by the former Prime Minister, Shri S.K. Dey has been again placed in a position to guide national policies and one can only hope that the Asoka Mehta Committee was able to profit by his presence to devise some concrete measures to forestall similar back-sliding on the part of the Union and State political activists.

One such measure often mooted for putting the panchayati raj institutions permanently on a sound footing is the suggestion to give them a specific status in the Constitution of India. At present, as already mentioned, the Constitution makes an explicit reference to only one of the panchayati raj institutions, viz., village panchayats and this is embodied only in the context of the directive principles of state policy whose execution is not mandatory upon the Union or State legislatures and executives. Enthusiastic proponents of panchayati raj often cite the lack of constitutional status as one of the major factors responsible for the failure of the panchayati raj institutions to reach a 'take off' stage, but, so far, no committee or study team appointed by either the Union Government or State Governments has even taken up this plea for consideration, let alone the question of pronouncing a favourable (or unfavourable) verdict upon it. The advocates of 'constitutionalisation' of panchayati raj have also failed to evolve a comprehensive blue print in this regard, although a few years ago a foreign scholar did publish in the *Indian Journal of Public Administration* what he called a

"Trial Plan for a Constitution for Rural India"; but his presentation was: (a) article length, (b) academic, and (c) attracted almost no attention at all among Indian political (including panchayati raj) elite. It is, indeed, a foregone conclusion that any proposal for according a constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions would meet with stiff resistance openly from State level political activists and the chances of introduction of such a far-reaching change in the political status of the panchayati raj institution can be regarded as *nil* not only in the near but in the foreseeable future. Still this point is being mentioned here because, despite the odds, there is an outside chance of the Asoka Mehta Committee picking up the thread of panchayati raj reforms from the point at which the AIPP Seminar on Fundamental Problems of Panchayati Raj organised at Udaipur on January 22-24, 1964 had left it* on account of the intellectual continuities between the policies of the Janata Party and the political and academic elite who had gathered at Udaipur to make a strong plea for development of panchayati raj institutions as units of self-government—a concept on which Shri Jayaprakash Narain, who was personally present throughout the seminar and guided its proceedings at every stage, laid considerable emphasis.

POLITICAL OVERTONES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ ADMINISTRATION

While the terms of reference of the Asoka Mehta Committee do not contain any explicit reference to the role of political parties and/or local politics in the context of panchayati raj institutions, the Committee would have, nevertheless, to consider this question at least from the point of view of: (a) panchayati raj elections, and (b) panchayati raj administration, the former being explicitly mentioned in the terms of reference. Turning our attention first towards the political overtones of panchayati raj administration we may mention that one of the inevitable consequences of 'democratic decentralisation' has been politicisation of local administration with the hitherto depoliticised bureaucrats becoming the victims as well as beneficiaries of the entrustment of administrative responsibilities in the hands of political executives. This is certainly one of the most unanticipated consequences of the introduction of democratic institutions for management of local administration. And the State level administrators, specially those responsible for execution of schemes with a large technical or technological component, regularly cite it as an argument against delegation of powers and responsibilities to panchayati raj institutions, where the lines of technical control, administration control and political control have, in their opinion, become so hopelessly confused that their panchayati raj counterparts cannot be expected to efficiently execute the schemes and projects

*One of the main recommendations of this Seminar was that "The Constitution should lay down as clearly as possible that the panchayati raj institution functions as governments in the same way as has been done for States and the Centre".

requiring technical skill or technical supervision.

The technical officers working in the panchayati raj institutions are expected to work under a system of triple control: overall control and supervision by the panchayati raj non-officials, administrative control and supervision by the chief executive officers (CEOs) of various panchayati raj institutions and the technical guidance and supervision and control exercised by the State level technical departments and their regional and zonal wings and/or officials. Taking an example from Rajasthan where the panchayat samiti is the focus of decentralisation, this means that the extension officers (EOs) working at the block level are subject to control by the *pradhan* (elective chairman of the panchayat samiti), the *vikas adhikari* (the CEO of the panchayat samiti) and the concerned district level officers (DLOs) who, in turn, work under the supervision and control of their regional and State-level superiors in the concerned technical departments. Normally the multiplication of 'lines of control' and 'lines of command' as delineated above would be regarded as an issue calling for administrative streamlining, but the fact that one of the three tangled lines emanates from a political source (*viz.*, *pradhans*) complicates the picture and imports political overtones into the situation with the *vikas adhikaris* and extension officers vying with each other to curry political favour with the *pradhans* and the entire team of panchayati raj officials joining hands with the non-officials to evade or dilute the administrative as well as technical control exercised by the State and regional level organisations. The emerging patterns of political relationship between the officials and non-officials working in close relationship in various panchayati raj institutions deserve, in fact, a full-fledged politico-administrative enquiry because the performance of panchayati raj institutions is crucially dependent upon the successful elimination of the political factor from the interpersonal relationship between the elective non-officials, technical experts and generalist administrators.

Turning now to the vexed issue of elections and politics in the panchayati raj institutions, we need not spend our precious energy covering the familiar ground again as far as the question of participation of political parties in panchayati raj elections is concerned. This is, essentially, a political issue and the various political parties should be allowed to take their own decision regarding participation and non-participation but an attempt must be made to ensure that panchayati raj elections are held in accordance with the norms of efficiency observed in the case for elections to the Union and State legislatures which are handled by a body enjoying a distinct constitutional status, *viz.*, the Election Commission. Rajasthan, the State to pioneer the introduction of panchayati raj, had sought to ensure this by entrusting the conduct of panchayati raj elections to the election department which assists the Election Commission in the conduct of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections and we would do well to examine the advisability of replication of this pattern of election administration in other States

also because it would enable the panchayati raj elections to be conducted by an expert body without incurring extra expenditure for development of expertise in management of panchayati raj election by a separate agency. While this would still leave considerable scope for inter-play of politics in panchayati raj elections (in the sense that the tenure and timing of elections would still remain, essentially, a political decision to be taken by the organisational and ministerial wings of the ruling party) this step would go a long way towards ensuring free and fair elections to the various panchayati raj institutions.

The real crunch of the political overtone of panchayati raj elections lies, however, not in the question regarding the agency for conducting elections but rather in making a choice between direct and indirect forms of elections because, although direct elections on the basis of secret ballot and universal adult franchise have been accepted as the norm for legislative elections, the debate between the protagonists of direct and indirect elections has not yet been settled. The Balwantray Mehta Study Team, as already noted, had provided for direct elections only at the village panchayat level but other States have tried to blend the two systems of elections by providing for direct election of some members of the higher tiers and even in Rajasthan the Girdharilal Vyas Committee suggested limited direct elections for the panchayat samiti as well as the zila parishad. One will have, therefore, to go into the details of the electoral patterns prevailing in various States and make a choice for either total indirect elections for panchayat samitis and zila parishads or for total direct elections or blend the two methods so that while the bulk of the members of the panchayat samitis and zila parishads may continue to remain indirectly elected, a limited number of seats in these bodies may be filled up by direct election. On the basis of the academic studies and administrative reports about panchayati raj elections available, we find it difficult to make any categorical remarks about the criteria on which this choice should be based except to say that the panchayati raj electorate has shown adequate sophistication to express its political will, no matter what mode of election is used to elicit it and, therefore, administrative convenience should not be regarded as a key variable in this choice decision.

MEMBERSHIP OF PEOPLES' REPRESENTATIVES

In this context we would also like to urge as a non-issue the controversy over the membership of MLAs, MPs and MLCs in the panchayati raj institutions because although considerable time and energy has been spent on discussing this issue at a variety of forums no reliable evidence has been brought forward to show whether the presence of these legislators makes a positive or negative impact on the performance of the panchayati raj institutions. Rajasthan, for example, has gone the farthest by providing not only *ex-officio* membership to the legislators but also giving them the right to vote

and hold elective office but no clear evidence is available to allow us to make a choice between total acceptance and total rejection of this model and the same logic applies to the variations put into practice by other States including Maharashtra where they are kept totally out of the panchayati raj institutions. This issue has been debated inconclusively for such a long time that it is better to leave the matter in the hands of individual States without attempting to lay down any general formula. This is specially because the issue involves the political interests of the people who are themselves responsible for law making and who can be expected to make proper use of their discretion when they themselves are involved.

Similarly, we might also refrain from political engineering in the context of panchayati raj elections by suggesting monetary or administrative benefits or bonuses to panchayati raj institutions where elections are contestless. Unanimity and consensus are amongst the most value laden words in the vocabulary of Indian politics and many State Governments have tried to encourage these preferred virtues by announcing special incentives for contest avoidance in panchayati raj elections, treating non-contest as an index of unanimity. The practice has persisted despite the Santhanam Committee's considered opinion that securing of unanimity through incentives like cash prizes was not desirable because though, in the short run, the provision of cash incentives may succeed by enabling the majority of a village to suppress the minority on the ground that contest would cause pecuniary loss to the village, its moral effect would not be wholesome. The logical force of this contention has not been diminished by the available empirical evidence relating to the positive benefits of electoral unanimity and there appears to be no valid reason for perpetuation of the practice of giving special incentives for the specific purpose of inducing the potential candidates for panchayati raj institutions to withdraw in each other's favour thereby presenting the electorate with a *fait accompli*. Giving monetary incentives for contest avoidance appears to be a patently political activity in which a democratic government should not, ordinarily, indulge.

TRAINING OF PANCHAYATI RAJ NON-OFFICIALS

While dealing with the topic of politics and panchayati raj institutions we would like to strongly urge a thorough scrutiny of the existing arrangements regarding the training of panchayati raj non-officials and take measures for strengthening training because the experience of the last one and a half decades has shown that neither the State Governments nor the panchayati raj non-officials have taken it seriously. The panchayati raj non-officials being elected representatives tend to regard all training as formal and text bookish while the State Governments are reluctant to spend large sums upon training people who are not likely to remain in office for a long time to make use of

the training imparted to them. However, since only a small fraction of the people once elected to any office in the various panchayati raj institutions are likely to drop totally out of public life, the force of this argument is considerably reduced. The State Governments should continue to make arrangements for training a large number of panchayati raj non-officials overcoming their propensity to put off summonses from the panchayati raj training colleges on one ground or the other. While the issue of syllabus-formulation and teaching methods can be tackled on a technical plane, the question of persuading the panchayati raj non-officials to attend training courses should be given full attention as even the provision of negative sanctions for repeated non-attendance has not proved to be effective in this regard and a large number of panchayati raj non-officials continue to remain ineffective in discharge of their duties while their administrative efficacy could be substantially increased at a nominal cost.

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Panchayati Raj Revisited*

K.B. Shukla

THE Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions was appointed by the Government of India in December, 1977 with Shri Asoka Mehta as its chairman to "enquire into the working of the panchayati raj institutions, and to suggest measures to strengthen them, so as to enable a decentralised system of planning and development to be effective".

The terms of reference of the Committee, *inter alia*, required it to examine the working of the panchayati raj institutions in regard to mobilisation of resources as also planning and implementation of the scheme for rural development in an objective and optimal manner, and in looking after the interests of the weaker sections of the society. The Committee was also required to :

- (a) examine the methods of constituting the panchayati raj institutions, including the system of elections, and to assess their effect on the performance of the panchayati raj system;
- (b) suggest the role of panchayati raj institutions, and the objectives, which could be attained through them, for integrated rural development in the future;
- (c) suggest measures for reorganising the panchayati raj system, and removing the shortcomings and defects, with a view to enable these institutions to fulfil their future role; and
- (d) recommend the form and content of the relationship that should exist between the panchayati raj institutions, the official administrative machinery, and the cooperative and voluntary institutions involved in rural development.

Since the introduction of panchayati raj in Rajasthan in 1959 followed by Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat and later in other States with suitable variations consistent with the requirements and situational compulsions of the respective States, a number of committees had been appointed by the Government of India to examine and report on one or the other

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXIV, 1978, No. 4, pp. 1159-72.

aspects of panchayati raj. In a number of States also committees had been set up to deal with the various issues relating to panchayati raj. However, the appointment of the Asoka Mehta Committee is to be regarded as an event of far reaching significance in the annals of panchayati raj for the reason that the Committee's endeavour has been to take a systematic and total view of panchayati raj in the country.

THE COMMITTEE'S APPROACH

For a proper appreciation of the main thrust of the report and the recommendations made by the Committee, it would be appropriate to refer to the broad approach adopted by the Committee in formulating their views on several vital issues affecting the future of panchayati raj institutions in the country. As the authors of the report have put it:

...our main endeavour throughout has been to lay down a new approach towards panchayati raj institutions—not in the usual point-by-point way but rather in concentrical circles, as they interact and depend on one another. The formulation of structures, functions and the utilisation of financial, administrative and human resources of panchayati raj institutions should, in our opinion, be determined on the emerging functional necessity of management of rural development. In our report, we have attached importance to the direction rather than specifics on certain items usually done and hitherto highlighted in various cognate reports. The institutional, structural and functional specifics of panchayati raj would, in our opinion, vary over time as well as space; we can do no more than indicate the spectrum of possibilities while the various State Governments would have to work out the actual details keeping in view their changing requirements. Whatever be the variations, they have to be round the crucial theme of linking institutions of democratic decentralisation with socially motivated economic development.

The Committee has taken note of the numerous changes in the perspective of democracy and development which have been unfolding during the past two to three decades. The report has sought to establish the fact that the span and complexity of rural development have so developed that the institutional structure of panchayati raj has become a functional necessity which has to be recognised if the developmental impulses are to be carried forward during the coming decades. The report says: "The new thrust of people's aspirations on the politico-developmental front has not merely deepened the conceptual meaning of decentralisation and development, but has also made the former a functional imperative for the latter. This is the governing perspective that the Committee has brought to bear on their report."

In a broad survey of the various phases through which panchayati raj has passed since its introduction in 1959, in the wake of the recommenda-

tions of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team, the Committee has observed that "the story of panchayati raj has been a story of ups and downs". Its three phases have been those of ascendancy, stagnation, and of decline.

Of the several factors which seem to have contributed to the weakening of panchayati raj in the country, mention has been made about their structural inadequacies, the role of the bureaucracy, weakening of political will, lack of conceptual clarity as also the dominance of the economically or socially privileged sections of the society in the panchayati raj institutions, thereby depriving the weaker sections of the benefits which would have legitimately reached them through these institutions. Apart from these, other factors such as factionalism, corruption, inefficiency, political interference, parochial loyalties, motivated actions, power concentration, etc., severely limited the utility of panchayati raj for the average villager. Lack of adequate resources was another crucial factor which thwarted their growth as a viable instrument of rural development management for over two decades. Having taken note of these developments, the Committee has observed that it would be unfair to single out panchayati raj for these weaknesses and failures which are all-pervasive and affect all levels of Indian polity. The problems of corruption, inefficiency and procedural irregularities are embedded in the social complex and no level of polity is immune to them. General factors such as the social milieu, the situational compulsion, the context of scarcity, maladjustments, the fast changing environment, inadequate knowledge, etc., further complicate the situation.

The Committee has, however, reaffirmed their vibrant faith in the democratisation process, as a component of modernisation, and concluded that "the fact of the matter is that the panchayati raj institutions has not been given a chance to serve as a vanguard of development... wherever they have been given the responsibility, to whatever limited extent, as in Maharashtra and Gujarat, they have done well".

Some of the spectacular gains of decentralised democracy have been in the political, administrative and socio-cultural fields. It became a process of democratic seed-drilling in the Indian soil by making an average citizen more conscious of his rights. It bridged the gulf between the bureaucratic elite and the people and also generated a new leadership which was relatively young in age, modernistic and pro-social change. From the developmental point of view as well, it helped the rural people cultivate a developmental psyche.

DISTRICT AS THE FIRST POINT OF DECENTRALISATION

It is against this broad perspective that the Committee's proposals for decentralised development management and the other aspects of panchayati raj have to be necessarily viewed. The district, as the first point of decentralisation, under popular supervision, below the State level, has been regarded as a functional imperative. Unlike the Balwantray Mehta Study

Team's proposals which, *inter alia*, recommended the block level panchayat samiti as the functional spearhead of all rural development programmes, the Committee has taken note of the texture of economic development over the last 25 years which has significantly altered the socio-economic matrix of rural India coupled with the long range developmental inevitabilities and shown their preference for a two-tier pattern with the zila parishad and the mandal panchayat as the basic units of panchayati raj.

That the gram sabha will continue to have an important role in activating the democratic process at the grassroots has been duly appreciated. It is envisaged that the village committees, which, are to replace the existing gram panchayats under the proposed set-up, would be required to convene two gram sabha meetings every year with a view to explain to people the programmes being executed in their areas and to channelise the peoples' feedback to the mandal panchayat.

In dealing with the role of nyaya panchayats, the committee has come to the conclusion that "while there is a great deal of consensus in favour of the decentralisation of justice, there is lack of enthusiasm for nyaya panchayats as they are functioning now". Recognising the need of the administration of justice on a decentralised basis the committee has endorsed the view that nyaya panchayats should be kept separate and not mixed up with development panchayats.

The Committee has noted with approval the guidelines offered by the Law Commission contained in their 14th report and felt that these deserve serious consideration. The Committee has favoured the view of the Bhagwati and Krishna Iyer Committees that a qualified judge should preside over the nyaya panchayat and the elected nyaya panchayat be associated with him in the administration of decentralised justice. Further, the elected nyaya panchas will not be entitled to seek re-election, and they should serve in an area other than that from which they have been elected.

While recommending decentralisation of powers and functions below the State level, the Committee has favoured the district as a key unit of decentralisation. Broadly speaking, the suggested pattern is modelled on the Maharashtra-Gujarat experience. The Committee's preference for the district as the first point of decentralisation has been influenced by a variety of factors. Apart from the fact that the district has remained the pivot of local administration for a very long time, availability of administrative and technical competence of the requisite calibre at the district level for planning, supervising and coordinating development programmes has led the Committee to favour the district as compared to the sub-divisional or the block level.

The zila parishad has emerged as the key unit of panchayati raj, endowed with a comprehensive range of developmental responsibilities. All developmental functions relating to a district that are now being discharged by the State are proposed to be entrusted to the zila parishad. Its functional

area will be large enough to cover agriculture and allied sectors, marketing, health, education, communications, rural industries, welfare of backward classes, family welfare, etc. Some of the items proposed to be kept out of the purview of the zila parishad are agricultural research, college and university education, minor irrigation projects, covering more than one district, inter-district communications, and cooperation. The role of the panchayati raj institutions in the field of cooperation has, for the present, been limited to motivating and organising the movement.

In addition to developmental responsibilities assigned to the zila parishad, another vital function sought to be devolved upon it is that of planning, "the district level tier should primarily have these functions of planning with a flow from the block and guidance from State". The Committee is emphatic that this function must be assigned to the zila parishad and the necessary competence built up.

This view is based on the assumption that the assessment of resources, credit availability and the necessary strategy formulation covering several blocks could be feasible at the district level; only an elected zila parishad would provide the much needed correctives to the techno-economic plans. The production and employment programmes prepared at the block level will also fit into the totality of the plan.

PROFESSIONAL TEAM FOR DISTRICT PLANNING

In order to enable the zila parishad to undertake the planning process, the need for a professional qualified team which should be stationed at the district level for the preparation of district plans has been adequately highlighted. Such a district planning cell is to consist of an economist/statistician, cartographer/geographer, agronomist, engineer (irrigation/civil), industries officer (small and cottage industries) and a credit planning officer. It is envisaged that this planning cell will function under the direct supervision of the chief executive officer of the zila parishad.

Formulation of the plan at the district level will naturally require continuous assistance from the State Government. Apart from designing and developing a uniform format and laying down the broad objectives, the State Government will be required to provide the financial and physical parameters within which the district plan has to be framed. Technical expertise needed for this task will also have to be made available to the zila parishad by the State Government. An equitable allocation of available resources, along with the emphasis on levelling of certain backward areas, will have to be kept in view while preparing the guidelines for plan formulation.

Before the technical plan prepared by the expert group is submitted to the State Government, it will be placed before a committee of the whole zila parishad. It is envisaged that this committee should have MPs and MLAs

as *ex-officio* members. This is expected to assure to a greater consideration of the technical plan placed before the zila parishad and provide the advantage of the knowledge of the MLAs, both of the field level and the State level problems. Thus the technical plan would, in a large measure, be influenced by the representatives of the people.

It has been provided that the State Government should not only have a machinery for examining the district plan but also have detailed discussion with the districts represented by the zila parishad and the planning group.

Having recognised the need for 'composite planning', the Committee has suggested that the district plan should encompass the developmental aspects of urban areas and the civic needs of rural areas. The district planning machinery will have to be specially geared to take care of the urban-rural continuum so as to plan for the regular inter-changes of goods, services and human population between the towns and the villages.

As regards the weaker sections, district plan formulation will have to develop programmes that should have an impact on their economy, with specific components beamed at them. The social justice committee of the zila parishad, to which a detailed reference will be made later, is to be responsible for giving final shape to the programmes meant for the weaker sections of the society.

THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

An important recommendation relating to the structural and functional designs of panchayati raj institutions in general, and the zila parishad in particular, is the introduction of the committee system. It is envisaged that the zila parishad will function through a number of committees; the important ones suggested are on agriculture, education, small industries, finance, public works and social justice. A standing committee, comprising of the chairman of these committees, will have the chief executive officer as its secretary. The committees are to be constituted on the basis of proportional representation with a view to have all shades of opinion represented on them. The concerned district officers will be the secretaries of their respective committees.

In its search for an areal unit of decentralisation unit below the district level, capable of handling the technological requisites of rural development, the Committee has arrived at the conclusion that, in due course, the mandal panchayat will have to be the base level organisation for project implementation. It will be located immediately below the block and will have the responsibility of meeting the municipal and welfare needs of the people besides other functions. This would alone enable these democratic institutions at the grass-root level to function as dynamic instruments of socio-cultural change ensuring a higher level of incomes and better standards of living for the bulk of the rural population.

The mandal panchayat would be constituted covering a population of

15,000 to 20,000. The Committee has envisaged that, in general, mandal panchayats will have to administer, coordinate and provide institutional supervision of on-going field level projects, it is also visualised that some of the block level functions would have to be moved upwards as only the district level body would be competent to discharge them.

It will be noticed that the Committee's recommendation regarding the constitution of mandal panchayats as the second basic tier of panchayati raj marks a departure from the existing situation. In most of the States, the block has, over the years, become the base level organisation for developmental and administrative activities. This being so, the Committee's recommendation that "as a transitional structure, the block can, therefore, continue as per the convenience of the States keeping in view the requirements and the stage of development" will be of far-reaching consequence insofar as the future contours of the panchayati raj institutions are concerned.

The Committee has shown its awareness of the futility of aiming at uniformity of institutional model throughout the country. It has been pointed out that the suggested structures may not be found suitable in tribal areas, hill areas and desert areas. Accordingly, a different population criterion may have to be followed to suit the local conditions. Likewise, it has been found expedient not to disturb the functioning of traditional panchayats in certain tribal areas which have been discharging a number of functions not necessarily related to developmental activities.

The administrative set-up suggested by the Committee is intended to meet the requirements of the proposed structural responsibilities and the functioning of the zila parishad. All the staff relating to the decentralised items at the district level, and those subordinate to them in the respective departments, should be under the zila parishad. In pursuance of this broad recommendation, it has been suggested that while class I and class II staff of the gazetted rank should remain with the State Government, though working under the zila parishad, the services of class III and class IV staff should be transferred to the parishad. The staff working in several departments in the zila parishad will work under the control of a chief executive officer who will function on the analogy of a chief secretary at the district level. While laying the overall policy and giving the necessary directions will be the responsibility of the elected representatives in the zila parishad, the chief executive officer will be responsible for all implementational functions. Thus, the future profile of the zila parishad is that of an elected body acting through committees with its chief executive officer heading the entire secretariat of the zila parishad. The Committee has shown its awareness of the difficult role proposed to be assigned to the chief executive officer. He would be required to have adequate knowledge and competence in man management and sufficient administrative experience. It has been suggested that a person who has successfully 'done' a district for a period of not less

than three years be appointed as chief executive officer, since without such experience and established capabilities the functions of the entire zila parishad administration with the enlarged duties will run into difficulties.

THE COLLECTOR'S ROLE IN THE DISTRICT

The district collector will continue to play an important role in the district set-up, notwithstanding the transfer of all developmental functions to the zila parishad. It has been recommended that the regulatory functions will remain with the collector, as, for some time to come, he will continue to exercise the regulatory, revenue and other functions assigned to him by the State Government. The collector has also been made responsible for organising the conduct of social audit as the representative of the State Government. The Committee has felt that the issue relating to transfer of regulatory functions to the zila parishad should be reviewed in due course.

As regards the recruitment of the zila parishad staff, it has been proposed that this may be undertaken by State/district level boards and they should function independent of zila parishad control.

The Committee has also noted that at present some districts are too large to facilitate the drawing up of a composite plan or effectively supervising the developmental work. Having regard to the guidelines of compactness for planning, effectiveness of supervision, manageability of programmes and a reasonable number of representatives in the zila parishad, creation of smaller districts, with about a million of population each, has been favoured. The Committee has expressed the hope that "quite likely the effective functioning of the panchayati raj institutions itself will force the situation in favour of the smaller districts".

Of the several recommendations of the Committee concerning the weaker sections, perhaps the most crucial relate to measures aimed at ensuring adequate representation to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes commensurate with their numbers. The Committee has recommended that: (i) in order to provide a fair deal to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes their representation in all panchayati raj institutions should be on the basis of their population; (ii) 666 talukas/blocks where the scheduled castes constitute more than 20 per cent of the population and in 329 talukas/blocks where scheduled tribes constitute a majority, the principle of reservation should be extended to elective offices.

Besides, certain other institutional devices have been suggested with a view to effectively contain and eliminate distortions and malpractices which so very often have been noted. Formation of social justice committees in panchayati raj institutions at various levels has been suggested to safeguard the interests of the weaker sections. It has been provided that the chairmen of these committees will invariably belong to the members of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes. These committees are to be assigned the following functions:

- (a) matters of common or individual projects designed for the weaker sections of the society, including scheduled castes/scheduled tribes;
- (b) planning and implementation of schemes including all matters relating to house sites, village sites, loans, subsidy, education, etc.;
- (c) investigation into and disposal of cases of injustice and discrimination being done to weaker sections, including persons belonging to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes;
- (d) planning, formulation and implementation of the schemes generally and out of the amounts earmarked for them or from their own resources; and
- (e) all other situations and matters arising in respect of each case.

Creation of an independent authority to carry out social audit is another measure intended to ensure that the funds and programmes earmarked for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as also the projects designed for them are implemented properly. Through social audit an administrative mechanism is sought to be created which seeks to achieve a system of sustained evaluation not only in terms of money spent on schemes and programmes, or the quantum of funds utilised, but rather in terms of short-term targets and long-term objectives and the nature and extent of their impact upon the targeted groups.

In addition to these measures, the constitution of a committee of legislature with, as far possible, majority representation of MLAs/MLCs belonging to scheduled castes/scheduled tribes to review the working of the programmes meant for these communities is intended to provide requisite political support to the objective of protection of the interests of the weaker sections. It is envisaged that these committees would also be responsible for the social audit of funds earmarked for scheduled castes/scheduled tribes. It is, perhaps, in recognition of the fact that without the strengthening of the economic base and redeeming them from economic dependence, political representation could imply no substantial change that the Committee has suggested, formulation of schemes and programmes leading to diversification of the occupational pattern of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Involvement of panchayati raj institutions at the implementational level in such fields as dairying, poultry farming, piggery, fisheries, scrub jungles, forestry, etc., has been stressed. It is assumed that a time bound programme beamed at these groups would facilitate the process of their socio-economic regeneration and bring about desired improvements.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO THE ZILA PARISHAD

Closely related to the functions and powers recommended for transfer to the panchayati raj institutions is the question of financial resources. The

Committee has expressed the view that decentralisation of all functions relating to plan implementation at district level to the zila parishad will also involve transfer of the finance along with the projects. The allocation of the projects/plan funds has to be done on a formula worked out to achieve equity among the districts and weightage to backward areas. Further, the non-plan expenditure incurred at the district or lower levels should also be under the administration of the respective tiers, since it would be conducive for composite development work and for building up the capabilities of panchayati raj institutions.

It has been pointed out that the taxation powers of the panchayati raj institutions should be limited and specific and must not operate inequitiously. In addition to levy of taxes by the panchayati raj institutions, it has been suggested that fees/taxes for services like lighting, sanitation, water supply, etc., may also be imposed. The Committee has recommended complete transfer of land revenue to panchayati raj institutions in a phased manner. Apart from these, transfer of public properties such as grazing lands, orchards, public lands, cattle pounds, fishery tanks, etc., have also been suggested to be statutorily vested in the mandal panchayat. While emphasising the need for the panchayati raj institutions in general and for mandal panchayats in particular to build up a more diversified resource base with greater intensity and elasticity, the Committee has suggested necessary support by the State Governments from budgetary sources supplemented by institutional finance for establishing remunerative enterprises. In addition, a permanent annual grant of not less than Rs. 2.50 per capita to mandal panchayats has been suggested as an objective to be pursued in the allocation of financial resources to the panchayati raj institutions.

The Committee has made a number of valuable suggestions relating to simplification of budgetary procedures, provision of a high ranking finance officer, expeditious settlement of audit objections, submission of utilisation certificate and other related matters. The Committee has also desired that the State Government should consider the desirability of constituting committees of the legislature to be specifically concerned with the financial and physical performance of panchayati raj institutions. It is also envisaged that along with the consolidated finance accounts, the State-Government should lay an administrative report before the legislature on panchayati raj institutions.

TRAINING FOR THE PERSONNEL

The Committee has emphasised the importance of human resource development as an integral part of the developmental process. Recognising the fact that in many ways human resource is more vital than the financial, the Committee has taken the view that human resource development should be the primary feature of panchayati raj.

Training is widely regarded as an investment in human resources. The Committee has, therefore, appropriately devoted its attention to this crucial aspect and offered a broad framework for developing a comprehensive training programme for the officials as well as the panchayati raj functionaries at various levels. An appreciative awareness of the current status and future requirements is distinctly discernible. Revitalisation of the existing training institutions which are reportedly functioning in a low key, augmentation of their numbers and resources and upgradation of the National Institution of Rural Development as the apex institution for training of trainers, and for carrying out field studies, research and consultancy assignments are some of the remedial measures recommended by the Committee. The important role which the Government of India can play in meeting the developing demands has also been adequately stressed. Periodical evaluation of the training methodology, the course content, the adequacy and quality of the trainers and other related matters have been suggested to bring about improvements. The Committee has noted the Government of India's resolve to launch a massive programme for adult education to develop the latest cure consciousness of the people which would, in turn, strengthen their faith in the panchayati raj institutions.

With a view to enlist the support of women and rural youth as also to secure their active participation in the panchayati raj institutions, the Committee has suggested a series of measures.

To secure their participation in elections for the two seats reserved for women in the zila parishad and mandal panchayat, any woman who gets the highest number of votes in the election, even if she does not win, should be taken in as a coopted member.

There should be a committee of women to operate and look after specific programmes which largely concern women and children. This would ensure that they do not become victims of the processes of change and that decisions are made by women themselves on priorities and choices involved in their programmes. Such a Committee should have the powers of the mandal panchayat with reference to the programmes specifically assigned to them.

Further, as a part of the current emphasis on rural industrialisation, special programme, aimed at providing gainful employment to rural women, are required to strengthen their management capabilities.

Similarly, involvement of rural youth in the democratic process at the grassroots is sought to be achieved by giving the yuvak mandals the status of an associate body in panchayati raj institutions. Suggestions have also been made to develop functional relationship of panchayati raj institutions with other youth organisations, notably the Nehru Yuvak Kendras and the National Service Scheme.

The Committee has also underlined the crucial role of voluntary agencies in mobilisation of people's support for panchayati raj. It is visualised that

those of the voluntary agencies that have the requisite expertise, and well-equipped organisations will provide the much needed assistance to the panchayati raj institutions in the formulation of schemes and projects. Voluntary agencies are also expected to support measures aimed at social change.

RELATION WITH THE COOPERATIVES

The suggested pattern of functional relationship between the panchayati raj institutions and the cooperatives will broadly be of five types:

- (i) Functions which could more appropriately and effectively be discharged by cooperative institutions.
- (ii) Functions requiring concurrent and conjoint action of panchayati raj and cooperative institutions.
- (iii) Cooperatives functioning as agents of panchayati raj institutions.
- (iv) Functions in respect of which cooperatives require facilities from the panchayati raj institutions.
- (v) Where cooperatives participate in functions which are essentially the responsibility of panchayati raj institutions.

It has been stressed that the relationship between panchayati raj institutions and cooperatives has to be of a coordinate rather than of subordinate character. Since panchayati raj institutions have to confine themselves to promotional and coordination tasks, representation of cooperatives on panchayati raj institutions will provide the institutional framework for a sustained dialogue between the two. However, reciprocity of representation has not been favoured.

The issue of urban-rural relationship, according to the Committee, has to be viewed in the context of needs for a developing economy and the attendant processes of affording a higher level of services and facilities. The Committee has accordingly felt that the merger of small municipalities with mandal panchayats would be desirable. It has been recommended that smaller municipalities should be treated at par with mandal panchayats for extending the benefits flowing from various special agencies such as SFDA, MFAL, etc., to the people living in these towns.

The role of panchayat raj institutions in providing valuable assistance and support to the Central and State sector corporations in a variety of ways has been brought out in sharp relief. It is visualised that mandal panchayats should assist in the establishment of regional rural banks by providing the necessary infrastructure.

Mention may also be made of some vital issues which have been the subject matter of animated debate and discussion ever since the inception of panchayati raj in the country. To begin with, in contrast to the view hitherto held in various influential quarters that political parties should keep

themselves aloof from panchayati raj institutions, the open participation of political parties in the elections to the panchayati raj institutions has been advocated. The Committee has viewed panchayati raj institutions as channels of purposive activity for political parties. The Committee has this to say...，“with the people and parties having adequate opportunities to exercise power at various levels, the democratic polity...will get richly and more severely structured and dissipation of national energy in political recrimination will hopefully yield place to constructive competition and mutual cooperation among political parties.”

The Committee has observed that its basic premise that decentralisation of functions, powers and authority to the panchayati raj institutions is a ‘functional imperative’ will have a direct bearing on the existing pattern of Union-State relationship. But the Committee has refrained from taking a view on this issue, on the ground that the matter has not been remitted to them for their consideration. However, the Committee has stated in unambiguous terms that “for effective functioning of the panchayati raj institutions, a proper climate for genuine decentralisation at all levels is necessary”. It has been suggested that “the implications for the existing scheme of distribution of powers between the union and the states...would require a detailed but separate consideration”.

Another equally important issue as to whether panchayati raj institutions should have a more elaborate reference in the constitution and be made a part of the organic law of the land has also been considered. The Committee has, in its wisdom, found expedient to transmit the proposals formulated by 21 eminent citizens containing their specific suggestions to the Government of India for their careful consideration.

Supersession of panchayati raj bodies on partisan grounds and postponement of elections for prolonged periods have been regarded as principal factors injurious to the health and vitality of panchayati raj institutions. The Committee is of the view that the State Governments should not supersede the panchayati raj bodies on partisan grounds. However, if supersession becomes inevitable, these should be replaced by the elected ones within six months. Need for making suitable statutory provisions to this effect has also been stressed. Likewise, the conduct of panchayati raj elections under the supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer, in consultation with the Chief Election Commissioner, has been advocated with a view to provide a higher status and supervision to the election system. □

Can Panchayati Raj Become the Agency for Integrated Rural Development?*

Henry Maddick

IF THERE is political will, if there is administrative reform, the answer to the title question is 'yes'. If there is political will, the rest is likely to follow, given time.

The issue is couched in these terms because looking back over eighteen years, it is clear that in those states where politicians wished to foster democratic decentralisation, the system of panchayati raj has been reasonably successful. In other states, politicians, ministers and chief ministers, party leaders, viewed the *pradhan* and especially the *pramukh* as competing political powers and were determined to reduce the competition. This is the first barrier to be overcome if panchayati raj is to have any chance of carrying through the heavy responsibilities outlined in the draft sixth plan. If the will can be generated to create a viable system, the other problems can be tackled—both corruption and partiality in planning and implementation, and outdated, obsolete and obstructive administrative systems and processes.

Various statements by the prime minister and ministers, numerous sections of the plan (the draft sixt five-year plan) make clear the tasks to be performed and the priorities to be accorded. These are:

- the removal of unemployment and significant under-employment in rural areas;
- an appreciable rise in the standard of living of the poorest sections of the population;
- provision by the state of some of the basic needs of the people in those sections, like drinking water, adult literacy, elementary education, health care, rural roads, rural housing for the landless and minimum services for the urban slums.

INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

To achieve these objectives there should be an approach based on integrated development in the rural areas. Whilst there must be great, in

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fact, predominant emphasis, upon the poorer sections in planning and implementation, integration can only mean a process of planning and management which embraces *all* the governmental activities related to the economic and social well-being of the rural areas. These are, first, the non-developmental programmes, that is, the substantive ongoing departmental activities to maintain momentum in well established fields—agriculture, the maintenance of irrigation systems, the maintenance of existing infrastructure, roads and buildings; the continuing and growing needs of education and health services. Secondly, there are the ongoing development programmes e.g., spreading of HYV, of dairy cooperatives and the special area or target group programmes such as command areas, DPAP, SFDA and the like. Thirdly, there is the minimum needs programme with its emphasis upon making social services accessible to all rural people through a hierarchy of service centres which also will greatly improve the amenities of rural living. Finally, there are the special efforts to diversify the rural economy and through these and through those programmes already cited, create greater and regular employment opportunities. All these will be operating at once and, under present arrangements, the resultant mix can only be regarded as an administrative nightmare, for its multiplicity of programmes has introduced separate funding, separate organisations, separate command areas, separate special officers and superimposed these on officers in the field who owe loyalty, some to state departments or some (in theory) to a panchayat body. Overall broods the inhibiting presence of the *ex-post facto* audit which is completely divorced from any development objectives. It is no wonder that such a concentration should render many programmes less than fully effective and lead to the criticisms of planning and implementation by many. Clearly, past efforts, by dedicated officials and non-officials alike, have been stultified by outmoded systems of administration, by technical and financial sanctions which impede phased planning action and even obstruct the obtaining of basic needs—petrol, transport, cement—for the most minute projects. More attention has been paid to the machinery of administration than to the results.

PRIORITY FOR THE WEAKER SECTIONS

What is needed if integrated development with priority for the weaker sections is to be achieved is:

- integrated planning of the long-term programme in productive and welfare areas;
- integrated planning of annual action plans;
- integrated project implementation within those action plans;
- allocation of responsibility for these to points where a marriage can take place between expert skills and an understanding of the local place and of the experiences of local people;

- according of influence to the poorer sections so that they can ensure priority being given to meeting their needs;
- flexibility in planning and administration to meet variations in demand, and in means of providing for needs.

Can panchayati raj become the effective agency for meeting this great challenge? It is suggested here that over a few years it could, but to do so requires a change in structure, a change in composition, a change in personnel and management and a change in the whole context of administration. Given these there could be an institution which can coordinate and execute plans, can bring people from grassroots upwards into government, and which can be flexible and sensitive.

If the activities envisaged are analysed it will be seen that they can be divided for purposes of planning and implementation into three categories:

- (a) major projects, e.g., national roads, major hydro-electric works, etc., which must be carried out by state or union agencies;
- (b) those projects in the secondary and tertiary sectors—electrification, skill development centres, schools, hospitals and service centres—which are to be carried out within district areas and many of which will be carried out by the district staff;
- (c) micro level projects, which have to be indicated rather than specified in plans, often owing their origin to primary groups, require intimate, time-consuming discussions, and great flexibility and confidence; and
- (d) new and ongoing municipal functions—village and small town roads, water, lighting, etc.

Most of the matters under (a) and (b) will have direct implications for district, block and village and must be taken into account, especially in relation to employment.

FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE

To handle all these activities it is suggested that a functional structure would be that of zila parishad to cope with district wide activities, their planning and implementation under (b) and (c), and with the implications of activities external to the district under (a) above. It is suggested that a new level—the cluster of panchayats—should be introduced to provide cohesion for the various extension workers and back up for them in their detailed, intimate (often individual) work with families and groups.

The block should become an agency of the zila, with responsibilities

for supporting the clusters and willing and implementing zila plans.¹ The panchayat should be given responsibility for village activities of the 'municipal' type—roads, clean water, public health, community buildings, etc.

Activities may be divided—the planning function and project implementation. As regards the first the district is likely to have the concentration of planners and certainly of highly experienced technical officers capable of producing viable plans. In order to make the plans intelligible and available for implementation, as well as for aggregation of microplans applicable in the preparation period, the district plan itself will have to be divided into manageable areas, and these would most probably be the blocks. So that each district would have a plan of each individual block, together with such parts of regional or state plans that included part or all of the districts.

It would be most undesirable that the districts should attempt the implementation of the approved plans from the district headquarters—traveling time, accessibility of officers and so on, would affect their involvement in getting things done. Subdivision of district department staff on a block area basis would seem to be the most efficient method of delegation of responsibility for progress. Yet this would weaken the link with the non-officials at zila level which could be very important. At the same time it would expose these more junior officers to personal pressures from individual non-officials, MLAs and pressure groups. It would seem, therefore, that some non-official element would be required at this level.

This could be indirectly elected, as is most general at present, or *ex officio*, or directly elected. Direct election, whilst favoured by many, would be imposing a great many elections on the people—union, state, panchayat, possibly district, and then block. Nor should there be another tier with the same legitimacy as that of the district. It would seem preferable to link these executive agencies for as long as their continuance is desired, with the cluster villages, by either treating the panchayats as electoral colleges or by using the cluster council for this purpose.

Their involvement in and approval of all microplans would be required before the plan could be incorporated in the district plans. They also should have authority over the VLW's appointed to their area and the extension officers at the cluster level—one of whom would be their secretary/executive.

MEETING PLAN REQUIREMENT

How does this scheme measure up to the plan requirements? As regards planning over ten and five years, and the action plan for each ensuing year,

¹There has been considerable discussion regarding the effectiveness of the block, both in the Dantwala Committee Report and in many articles and papers. Too numerous and too small to plan, too large to be in intimate contact with primary groups, it would seem better for the time being to regard it as having a dual role—executing zila programmes within its area and capacity, helping forward cluster programmes and consulting and being consulted over plan formulation from below and above.

the district level group of technical officers and planning staff should be able to produce integrated plans covering sixth plan objectives, ongoing routine programmes and ongoing special programmes. Microplanning of specifically local plans—probably for shorter periods, given the 'experience perspective' of the deprived groups in particular—can be fostered, discussed, amended and agreed through whatever production groups are envisaged and through the 'cluster council'. Help would be needed from the district (or sub-district) staff over technical details and in putting them into the agreed format. These plans would then go up to district through the sub-district staff who would forward them with observations concerning practicality and urgency for use of their seniors at district level. The sub-district staff would not be able to amend and if they suggested serious amendments were necessary then reference would have to be made back to the cluster council. In fact sub-district staff should take the plans back for discussion, before sending to district, or better still, have ironed out difficulties in the discussions prior to finalising.

Implementation planning should be at the level at which the different projects will be put into effect with a commitment by the district level technical officers to discharge the requirement for materials and personnel at the dates needed. Implementation techniques might require working out at the district for block and cluster to put into effect. Much of the implementation could be done at those two levels.

There is rightly considerable concern about the intimidation in many areas of the poorer sections. Suggestions have been made for extra-institutional arrangements such as unionisation and other types of pressure groups. These have the risk that the forces generated may be controlled by unscrupulous, irresponsible and non-accountable individuals, and power seeking organisations. It is suggested that representation on panchayati raj institutions should, indeed, must be amended so as to give proper weight to the views of the weaker sections who in many areas *are 40 per cent or more of the population*. It is with this in mind that the following system of representation is suggested.

Membership of panchayat and zila should be by direct election by the inhabitants of the village or zila area on the Maharashtra pattern. That of the sub-zila agency should be *ex officio*, as it has no direct executive powers, consisting of the chairperson of the cluster panchayats. Members of the zila from the area might be invited to attend for certain items by the chairman, or say any four members, but the zila members would have no vote and could not attend without invitation.²

It is necessary because of its connections with people in the village, making up the cluster, to ensure that every panchayat and the deprived

²This device is suggested because of the experience of the MLAs and MPs attending panchayat samiti meetings, monopolising meetings and over-influencing the less experienced members.

classes in those panchayat areas shall be represented. The *sarpanchas* would automatically be elected together with one representative of the deprived classes on a restricted roll. That roll could also be used for a reserved seat or seats on the panchayat. A minimum of four women should be elected by women alone, for they contribute a great deal of the family and community economy, and with these female non-officials, the poorer classes will probably have a majority. Arrangements such as these would provide for both group and geographical representation in line with our broad policy objectives of given weight to those whom traditional rural leaders tend to ignore.

It would seem that these provisions for representing the small and marginal farmers, the landless and the unemployed, *i.e.*, those below the poverty line, will secure a majority in the cluster panchayat. The council would elect a chairperson from their number. There is the danger that they might be intimidated and it is here that the voluntary agencies can encourage the fearful to stand out for their rights and report instances of intimidation of those elected representatives, their family or friends.

At the sub-zila level a majority of the members (the chairman or chair-women of the cluster panchayats) are likely to be representative of the weaker sections since those sections would have the majority on the cluster panchayats when electing their chairperson.

DISTRICT OMBUDSMAN

Further steps could be taken to enhance the power of the grassroots. The creation is suggested of a watchdog, an ombudsman, in every district who should receive reports of cases of intimidation through any channel—non-officials, officials, voluntary agencies, cooperatives and private individuals—and investigate. Where the charge was substantiated then the district magistrate should be given powers to award punishment according to a prescribed scale or formula.

At zila level, other steps might be taken because it would be necessary to have non-officials of high capabilities to grapple with planning alternatives and the implementation schedules for programmes. For some time to come this might be beyond the capabilities of the average representative of the poorer sections. Two devices are possible—one at zila level is to review the social justice committee. Not much trust is placed in it at present, but it could be composed of the chairpersons of the sub-zila agencies, a special officer reporting directly to a minister, for say, integrated rural development, panchayati raj and cooperation, one or more AVARD officers in the area, and a representative of the cooperative movement. They would be served by the officials of the zila in the same way as any other committee and they alone could sanction the use of moneys directed towards the poorer sections under various programmes. They could not impede the deployment of

resources from other sources for the development of all forms of production; they could require details of all proposals for welfare services and projects to meet the minimum needs programme and should be given power to refer them back for further consideration and if their proposals were rejected, require a reasoned reply in writing.

Such replies as well as the general pattern of spending and the success in reducing unemployment would be the subject of another institution, the second safeguard. This could take the form of a select committee of the legislature charged with ensuring that both individual zilas and State departments were complying effectively with the national policies for increasing employment and raising the living standards of the poorer sections. All programmes would be looked at in a random sample of zilas, special attention being paid to those specifically for the poorer sections and for the impact that other programmes might have on them. Those authorities which had a poor record in this respect would be cautioned and a high power team of officers with, if necessary, special powers, seconded to them temporarily to rectify the situation. The existing powers of suspension are too draconian and in most cases defeat the objectives of delegated democratic effective bodies. Fresh elections might be considered. In time a responsible effective authority should result and a valuable lesson in democratic responsibility be learned.

Hopefully by these means the forces of organised weaker sections can be channelled through a legally created institution. Power must be kept within the law, lest it becomes a random anarchic force in society which ultimately breaks down all institutions

IMPROVEMENT OF PROCEDURES

As regards administrative procedure and management, two major approaches are necessary—the improvement of procedures within the authority and the creation of a context in which these can operate. Present-day operation whether by the zila or the district is far from integrated or co-ordinated. Planning is a farcical waste of time because available resources are not known in advance, decisions on proposals are subject to both technical sanction in State departments and financial sanction in the finance department. Under these circumstances integrated planning—phased, inter-dependent—can never be achieved. Despite great efforts having been made in some districts, they have been unable to calculate what is the total amount of money available to a district in any year. How can anyone talk of planning in such circumstances?

It is suggested that the funds for all programmes in categories (b), (c) and (d) from Union and State sources, and all non-earmarked funds should be aggregated at State level, as well as those for ongoing ‘maintenance’

activities. This sum should then be divided between each zila on a rough calculation of needs and resources. Notification of likely sums to be allocated should be made as to 75-86 per cent at least 11 months ahead of the action plan year and a fair indication given for upto 5 years ahead, and for a further 10 years if possible. Planning of long range projects would then be possible with due allowance for recurrent expenditure implications. The zila will be responsible for establishing its own priorities for its own programmes chosen to achieve, in the best way possible for that area, the plan objectives.

All local taxes should be fixed and collected by the zila, with panchayats and clusters entitled to add their own cess or special tax. It is hoped thereby to ensure realistic tax levels and their actual collection, neither of which are widespread at the present. Distribution of these local revenues would be at the discretion of the zila except for the taxes passed by panchayat and cluster which must be returned to them in full.

Sanctions both technical and financial would go. Once the zila had received a global sum, financial sanctions would be unnecessary. There would, however, be limits to the authority of a technical officer—either financial or technical. If in the *preparation* of plans these were being exceeded, he would be required to call in as consultant a more senior officer. The latter would give his advice and be involved in the planning process and thus ensure that the proposals to be incorporated in the plan were technically sound. It might also be necessary to call in such help, or if not available, private consultants, to assist in implementation. With a predetermined global income, financial sanctions would go; with the use of higher technical skills in an advisory or consultative capacity, technical sanctions would go. They have been and are proving to be delaying, divisive and destructive and their passing will benefit development programmes.

PHASED ACTION PLAN

If these amendments could be attained, then the way is open for the zila to deploy its resources according to local needs and to integrate planning. In fact planning becomes not only possible but worthwhile, Union and State policy priorities can be woven into policy proposals by officers and a small policy planning committee of the *parishad* can vet these proposals against local knowledge and put forward alternative programmes for discussion and approval in the *parishad*. Once approved it would be the responsibility of the officers to implement the programmes, and non-officials should be involved only in evaluation of results.

Like planning this requires an integrated phased action plan, which will need to make use of appropriate, simple techniques both of appraisal and interlinking. Coordinated implementation will also need to use simple techniques—network analysis, for example, and simple management information systems.

Great efforts should be made to develop approaches to corporate management which, in as simple a way as possible, will bring officers from various professions and departments to adopt plans jointly and accept an individual and common responsibility for their implementation. Planned programme budgeting is too complex and too experimental to be taken far, but the use of some of its hierarchy of objectives and programmes could be illuminating to the officers.

The chief executive officer would be made clearly responsible for the overall planning approach and for the efficiency of the whole organisation and the effective functioning of each department. A finance officer would be second only to him in the zila hierarchy. He would develop the financial function as an aid to decision-making and lift the accounts section from a book-keeping to an accounting role.

For all projects, one officer should be appointed a project manager or controller. His would be the task of ensuring that the work went according to plan or of bringing participating departments and levels together to remedy any shortfalls or make consequential adjustments in a programme they had jointly adopted.

Personnel policies and problems are largely neglected in discussions of panchayati raj patterns. There is a strong case for developing the personnel function at zila level. Each zila would need a personnel section to look after personnel development, welfare, training, manpower planning, recruitment and industrial relations, bearing in mind problems of organisational development.

Staff will need strengthening. At zila level there should be the planning team working closely with technical officers on developing plans. The team would have responsibilities for the whole zila plan and would be divided to work closely with particular sub-zila agencies as well. At cluster levels there would have to be a considerable increase in the number of VLWs. These would be grouped according to their involvement in productive projects and programmes; social service and infrastructure issues, and 'regulatory' matters like land reform. One of their number of possibly a more senior officer would be their leader and act as executive secretary to the cluster panchayat. Not only do numbers of 'village workers' need to be increased but so also do career prospects need improving. Technical advances call for greater specialisation, but in turn this raises the need for a coordinator, a team leader, to bring out a spirit of cooperation. Of the greatest importance is the need to provide an *easily accessible* place, an office, where the countryman can get all information about government services and pay all his various dues instead of struggling to reach the distant multiple points of service supply as at present.

INTEGRATING SERVICE CADRES

Another major problem needs tackling over the next 5-10 years. All top level staff, class I and II, on whom corporate management depends are at present on deputation from State and Union cadres. This has an advantage in that some degree of independence is secured to them whereby their ability to give advice, to implement programmes fairly, is enhanced. On the other hand, their dominant motivation is that of promotion and often of transfer away from the rural area. For this they depend on the heads of their services at regional and State level. Such dependence reduces commitment to the panchayati raj limits and system and reduces his involvement in the area problems. It may introduce sectoral priorities (supposedly what the service director wants) rather than an acceptance of zila team decisions, and thus generally weaken the strength of the arrangement at the zila level.

Over the years would it be possible to blend the two—the professional State controlled services and local authority employment. Thus each service needed in local government could be organised Union-wise as regards recruitment, initial training, post-experience training, research work and professional standards. On posting to a State, the technical department concerned would control their postings during an initial period—say up to 8 years—in order that the officer gains on the job experience. From then officers would be on the staff of the authority which appointed them by competition to an appropriate level post. Movement after that would be to other authorities or to State Government and Union Government by advertisement. Rural postings, unpleasant postings, would attract higher salaries or benefits in the form of, e.g., education grants for family and other compensations. In other words the officer would only apply for jobs that were on a better scale or were in places to which he wanted to move. A State-wide salary scale and pension arrangement would apply. Each department would be responsible for recalling officers for training. Local authorities would have rights of dismissal but only following a carefully elaborated procedure designed to protect the officer from arbitrary action. In fact the development of professional associations and legislation to protect employment would also cover this aspect. It might be necessary to apply special procedure, e.g., involving the State department, where there was a proposal to dismiss the most senior officers.

If these proposals were adopted then officers would have freedom of movement, local bodies appoint their own staff on scale or supra-scale, if they were unable to fill vacancies. The loyalty of the staff member would be strengthened because he had chosen to go there and his reference for better posts (for which he might apply in the future) would be given by that authority. On the other hand some protection against arbitrary dismissal would be created. The career structure would be as attractive to new

entrants as at present and the handicap of random and frequent postings would be avoided.

PANCHAYATI RAJ DEPARTMENT

There will always be a temptation for the State departments to build up line functions in the field, either in new areas of activity or by taking back (for various good reasons) functions being discharged at the zila. Moreover, a system of decentralised democratic institutions is not suddenly going to slip into gear and operate at a high level of administrative efficiency or political restraint. A strong department dealing with panchayati raj, co-operation and voluntary societies³ will be needed in each State. It should be responsible for training and for helping the units to develop conventions of behaviour, of inter-relations between officials and non-officials, and in protecting the system against departmental moves aimed at a reduction in the function of local bodies. Provision could be made for zilas to claim functions to be delegated to them.

This department should also be responsible for audit. At the present time the spectre of the audit is behind every officer, inhibiting initiative and experimentation. Yet without these qualities how can officials really help families, give actual effective timely assistance to individuals or production groups, explore new ways of increasing self-reliance of the country people? The department for panchayati raj could link the audit function with development and transform it into an educational activity linked with its on-going programme of training and research.

Many other matters remain unmentioned. Those that have been raised here are dealt with cursorily.⁴ The principle however remains—panchayati raj can be adapted to decentralised democracy which gives proper weight to the expression of the views of and the direction of programmes to the weaker sections. It can be a flexible organisation, sensitive to needs of individuals and places, supple in its responses. It can provide for integrated planning and integrated implementation of programmes.

This will not happen overnight. Some States, probably, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra, will be its trail blazers. Even in those States there will be variations to meet the degree of experience and understanding and interest of the people in controlling their own affairs.

Other States will rely more on the official element until such time as the

³In so brief an article as this there is space only to say that each and particularly the cooperatives, have important roles to play and close cooperation between them and panchayati raj units must be ensured by formal and informal linkages.

⁴For a fuller treatment of the issues raised, reference should be made to the author's 'Panchayati Raj', Longmans, 1970, and to a paper prepared for the G.O.I./ESCAP Round Table, "Adapting Indian Administration for Rural Development", New Delhi, August, 1978 (paper DP/AARD/18).

pressure for democratic involvement overwhelms them. May it not be left too late, for the forces of anarchy are present in all societies, and what the powerful will not cede constitutionally, the weak—in present political terms—may find they can and will obtain by naked force.

If the decision is to use the district organisation, then care must be taken as to two aspects. First to make it truly discretionary and ask to be flexible and relevant in its planning and implementation. Secondly to impress upon it the need to work with its people. If it does that, one may well ask ‘why not panchayati raj’?

Why not indeed? Given changes and modifications of obsolete procedures, given research and training, given patience and faith, India could show the world her skills and success in providing integration, flexibility, and above all, democracy in rural development.

A NOTE

It is suggested that the structure to be set up for the integrated rural development programme be as follows:

- at the village level—village panchayat;
- at the grouped village level—cluster panchayat⁵;
- at the district level—zila parishad; and
- at the block level—an officers’ sub-group with an advisory committee.

The powers, duties, rights and functions of these bodies are more difficult to define, save in general terms, until problems relating to finance and staffing are settled.

Broadly, however, they might be:

- (a) To village panchayats—
clean water; public hygiene; community meetings place, etc.; conduct of *gram sabha*.
- (b) To cluster panchayats:
—to make proposals for other activities to the bodies authorised to carry them out, which bodies shall return a reasoned reply;
—oversight and direction of cluster extension staff covering agriculture, welfare services and miscellaneous activities;
—coordination where necessary of plans of primary groups in agricultural, industrial, cooperative activity;
—ensuring services and inputs required are available and delivered either direct or through cooperatives, sub-zila agency, or private sources;

⁵This new council has been so styled to distinguish it from any of the somewhat similar groupings for a variety of purposes which already exist in a small number of States.

- development of schemes for improving quality of life within whole cluster or parts thereof—housing, feeder roads, etc.;
- right to be consulted on *all* aspects of plans and projects developed by zila or block officers affecting that cluster;
- right to veto such plans and projects as may affect only their area;
- to discuss those affecting more than their area with the authorising level of government, local or central;
- such other functions as may be delegated by higher tier but only if accepted by the cluster panchayat or accorded to individual clusters by ministerial order;
- to operate a system of ‘recalling’ their representatives.

(c) To zila parishad:

- all government functions pertaining to productive or welfare services; municipal functions; functions for the benefit of the area not the responsibility of another agency of government;
- production of structure and long range plans, medium and action plans relating to these;
- production of implementation plans;
- levying and collection of taxes on own behalf, on behalf of the government and charges for services, e.g., electricity;
- sanctioning of projects—both technical and financial sanctions—up to a limit to be decided in the light of the level of establishment—provided they are within the human and financial resources of the zila;
- control of staff of *all* grades;
- coordination of cluster panchayats where their activities affect other clusters, or where they bear upon development activities or infrastructure works which are a district responsibility to implement;
- such other functions as may be authorised by the State Government;
- such other functions and enabling powers as may be claimed by the zila on behalf of either the one zila claiming or on behalf of all zilas, and be accorded by State Government or, in the event of dispute, by an independent tribunal;
- in all matters, to act within the broad statements of policy issued by Union and State Governments;
- in matters subject to direction by any agency authorised to direct, to carry out those directions;
- to operate the system enabling the electorate or recall their representatives.

(d) To sub-zila agency:

- to be consulted by zila over plans;
- to delay, by resolution of majority of non-officials attached to agency, for re-consideration at the next meeting of the zila, any matter affecting that sub-area alone to which they object;

- to this objection the zila be legally required to issue a considered reply approved by the *parishad*.
- to consult and collaborate with zila over project implementation as the zila may require;
- to consult with clusters over plans and implementation affecting particular clusters;
- to coordinate activities affecting more than one cluster;
- to give technical advice and guidance to primary groups and to clusters over their programme and projects;
- to guide and supervise the VLWs;
- to supply or ensure timely and adequate quantity of inputs needed for projects being carried out by clusters which are within the spending levels of the clusters, provided such requests are made within the time limits agreed between the two levels;
- to carry out works and projects needing more expertise than or requiring equipment not available to the VLWs.

It should be noted that these proposals do not pretend to be comprehensive or exhaustive nor do they attempt to be in legal phraseology. Rather they are indicative of the sorts of powers, duties and responsibilities which would go a long way to achieving the twin goals of integrated rural development and a system of delegation of powers which would enable, but not ensure, decision-making at the level of action and involvement, and the opportunity for democratic processes to work more effectively, especially at the grassroots.



Administrative and Organisational Issues in Rural Development*

Mohit Bhattacharya

ADMINISTRATIVE AND organisational issues in rural development need to be discussed with reference to the objectives and scope of rural development. In a country of India's size and diversity, rural development, in whatever ways it is defined, is obviously a massive and highly complex endeavour. This should not, however be interpreted as an effort to develop the rural areas autonomously and as a closed system. Rural development has to be planned and pursued within a national development model subsuming the interdependent and interactive growth of both rural and urban areas.

The discussion on our theme, to be meaningful, must touch upon three essential aspects. First, a concept of rural development in the Indian context has to be spelt out. Secondly, the rural situation as it has been evolving over the successive plan periods has to be briefly sketched. Thirdly, the administrative-organisational profile of rural India has to be explained in some details.

Conceptually, rural development, in our context, is a process directed essentially towards improving the living standard of the rural poor. As Uma Lele writes in the African context, such development effort has three important features:

- (a) mobilisation and allocation of resources as so to reach desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive services available to the subsistence rural sector;
- (b) mass participation to make sure that resources are allocated to the target group and that the productive and social services actually reach the group; and
- (c) making the development process self-sustaining in terms of development of appropriate skills and implementing capacity, and of

*From *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXIV, 1978, No. 4, pp. 1173-88.

institutions at different levels to ensure effective use of existing resources and foster mobilisation of additional financial and human resources.¹

Rural development, as envisaged in the Sixth Plan document, has been similarly conceived. To quote the document :

The aim of agricultural and rural development will be growth for social justice, achievement of full employment in the rural areas in a period of ten years and removal of poverty.²

Turning now to the second aspect, one identifies from the evolving rural scenario a number of bright spots as well as a few dark ones.

On the brighter side, foodgrains production has been increasing steadily and there is today an accumulated buffer stock of nearly 19 million tonnes. In 1960-61 the country was producing 82 million tonnes of foodgrains which rose to 121 million tonnes in 1975-76. Food import has stopped and some exports are bringing in exchange earnings. The areas under high-yielding varieties rose from 9.20 million hectares in 1968-69 to 26.00 million hectares in 1973-74.

Basic inputs such as water, credit and fertiliser are being augmented to cope with the rising demand. During 1960-61 to 1973-74 gross irrigated area grew at an annual compound rate of 3.18 per cent. Net irrigated area rose from 24.7 million hectares in 1960-61 to 31.5 million hectares in 1971-72. Minor irrigation potentials are being steadily increased through tubewells and dugwells, and speedy energisation with the help of rural electrification. Adoption of new agricultural technology is reflected in the steady rise of fertiliser use. From a paltry 306,000 tonnes in 1960-61 it rose to 2.8 million tonnes in 1973-74 and the estimated use in 1977-78 came to 4.3 million tonnes.

The role of credit in agricultural development hardly needs any emphasis. Institutional credit contributed to only about 3 per cent of the total credit requirement in 1950-51. The contribution rose to 16 per cent in 1960-61. On the eve of the Sixth Plan, the figure is placed at around 40 per cent. According to current calculations, total credit outflow from co-operatives and other institutional sources by the end of 1983 is expected to be over Rs. 7,500 crores, which, on an average, works out to about Rs. 19 crores per district. The availability of institutional finance on such a large scale outside the free budgetary resources is a totally new factor in the structure of the rural economy.

¹Uma Lele, *The Design of Rural Development, Lessons from Africa*, published for the World Bank by the John Hopkins University Press, 1975, pp. 19-20.

²The Draft Sixth Plan (1978-83) (Vol. III), Planning Commission, Government of India, 1977, p. 1. (mimeo).

This is obviously a very encouraging picture of the rural economy. Apparently it might look quite rosy; but there are very many black spots and nagging weaknesses which are indicative of a deep malaise afflicting the rural sector. The rural population grew from 298.5 million in 1951 to 438.8 million in 1971. The percentage variation in the last two census decades is around 21 per cent. Since 1951 census, rural population continues to account for more than 80 per cent of the total population which shows a meagre siphoning off to urban areas. Agriculture continues to be the major source of livelihood of the majority of the total national work force. Strangely enough, in spite of the development of the large scale manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, the share of agriculture in the total work force has not diminished at all. It was 73 per cent in 1961 and 73.8 per cent in 1971.

The employment situation in the rural areas has been deteriorating fast as new entrants join the labour force annually and there is virtual non-implementation of the minimum wages provisions. In India, one characteristic feature is the preponderance of the unorganised sector which sustains most of the total work force (91 per cent in 1971). In the unorganised sector, again, it is agriculture which absorbs most. The employment scene being what it is, one can imagine the gripping crisis in the rural economy. To quote the draft Sixth Plan :

The number of landless agricultural workers increased by about 19 million during the decade 1964-71. The share of landless workers in the total unorganised work force increased from 18 per cent to 24 per cent. This fact reflects several tendencies which should cause concern, namely, growing population pressure in the rural areas, lack of opportunities for non-agricultural work, and the proletarianisation of small farmers, artisans, and women workers, as a result of eviction and/or technological displacement. Since the landless agricultural labour population bears the largest incidence of rural poverty and unemployment an increase in its size reflects the correlated increase in poverty and unemployment.³

Rural poverty, under the circumstances, shows no sign of abatement. There are various estimates available of the people below the poverty line calculated on different bases. The draft Sixth Plan calculations, based on recommended nutritional requirements, puts the poverty figure at 47.85 per cent of the total rural population in 1977-78. This is, no doubt, alarming, especially in the light of the fact that the nation has by now passed through five national plan periods.

Land which is the basic productive asset in the rural areas continues to be in the possession of an influential minority of the landed elite. As the

³ *The Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83, (Vol. II) p. 104.*

draft Sixth Plan points out, out of about 2 million hectares of land declared surplus, hardly about 25 per cent has been distributed. The ceiling laws have not been seriously enforced in many instances. Nor have the tenancy regulations followed the national guidelines. As the plan document affirms: "A more equitable distribution of land resources through land reforms has consistently been a major political objective since independence. But the will to implement this policy has been sadly lacking all along."⁴ Without a redistributive land reform, it is difficult to envisage any other policy that would have quick impact on the rural economy and reduce poverty to any great extent in the shortest possible time. Rural development thus assumes more a political complexion than an economic one.

FRAGMENTATION OF FIELD ADMINISTRATION

The third aspect relates to the administrative-organisational profile. The rural scene in administrative terms, exhibits a number of features, important among which are fragmentation of field administration, ineffective and spurious decentralisation, proliferation of special agencies, and institutional inadequacy to deal with the problems of the rural poor.

At the field level where development programmes are executed, multiplicity of functional departments and agencies has led to virtual balkanisation of the field. Admittedly, new programmes and massive investments lead to the creation of new units and specialisms. What has happened, however, is that over the years the functional agencies dealing with irrigation, animal husbandry, forestry, etc., have grown in scale and complexity and carved out their independent areas of operation. At the ground level, functions have their natural inter-dependencies. In the absence of horizontal coordination, the functional agencies move on in isolation from one another which is dysfunctional from the point of view of optimisation of investments and is detrimental to the interest of the client—the farmer, who has to run around for his needs.

Functional insularity is further reinforced by departmental verticalism. Each department is an empire unto itself starting from the secretariat-directorate to the field.

The problems of the area as a whole and the linkages that need to be established to solve them go by default in this kind of organisational arrangement. The organisation becomes more inward oriented, serving its own interest as distinguished from the interest of the client and the area.

To allow field organisation to operate effectively, decentralisation of authority within a broad policy frame is an absolute necessity. There is a lot of spurious decentralisation all around; actually the field organisation

⁴ *The Draft Five Year Plan*, Vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

has to look to sanctions and approvals upward, almost at every step which is frustrating and dysfunctional for the activities in progress on the ground. One of the reasons for this state of affairs can be traced in the dichotomy between status and task in our administrative system. While tasks are pushed down to lower operational levels, authority rests with the higher echelons. So schemes and projects have to be referred to higher levels for clearance, as these are status levels in the organisation. Operations during times of emergency, like flood or famine, have revealed that centralisation of authority is neither necessary nor desirable, and the field level can undertake many of the activities without the formalism of central clearance.

The other kind of spurious decentralisation is evident from the state of panchayati raj. In most States, panchayati raj is on the brink of collapse. Even in Maharashtra and Gujarat, special schemes of development like DPAP and CAD have not been entrusted to panchayati raj bodies.

Another important feature is the proliferation of the special programmes accompanied by special *project organisations*. Programmes like DPAP, SFDA, ITDP and CAD have these built-in arrangements. The special organisations around the programmes have a nucleus staff, but they depend mostly on the regular line departments for the execution of projects. Experience shows that this kind of project organisation has neither the planning skill nor the implementation machinery. These organisations exist for funding purposes mainly and often find it hard to get their work done through the regular line departments who do not like to submit themselves to the discipline of the project organisation. In consequence, the project set-up tends to become an island unto itself. It does not mesh up with the larger organisational outfit at the field level and cannot become very effective as a result. Special agencies are created to achieve definite results. But in practice, these hardly work that way. The accent is more on expenditure than getting results within a definite time horizon.

Beneficiary oriented organisations like SFDA and ITDP face a peculiar problem of leakages⁵ in the sense of spill over of benefits from target groups to non-target groups. Wherever the beneficiary is identified on the basis of the size of holding, authenticity of land record is of paramount importance. In the absence of proper land records, the formal beneficiary may be a wrong person for entitlement of project benefit. The leakages through spill over effect may not always be easy to plug. More imaginative benefit-cost appraisal at the project formulation stage may help to some extent. Administrative vigilance at the implementation stage is required to detect and rectify the defects in operation, as far as practicable.

Special organisations for target groups like small and marginal farmers and landless labour have not been fully tried out so far. This is an area where

⁵C.L.G. Bell and John H. Duloy, "Rural Target Groups" in Hollis Chenery, et. al., *Redistribution with Growth*, O.U.P., 1974.

more effective organisational planning is needed. The small farmer has hardly any real access to the input supplying organisations which are usually controlled by the big farmer. There are innumerable studies on how the small and marginal farmers are squeezed out of the cooperatives and denied access to agricultural inputs. Government extension agencies are also heavily tilted in favour of the big farmer, specially those designated as 'progressive' farmers. Due to lack of access to organised marketing, the small farmer is again denied a reasonable price for his product. Between sowing and harvesting, he has to depend on non-institutional sources for consumption expenditure—for survival.

CHANGING POLICIES

It is against this background of apparently vigorous organisation efforts that one can now reflect on the shifting policy responses to cope with the rural problems. The strategy of rural development has shifted gradually from macro to micro or area-based and clientele specific development. In 1952 the community development (CD) movement started and it was very general in scope and not specifically production oriented. As an officially sponsored and government administered programme, the CD movement had its internal contradictions which had to be resolved by the introduction of popularly elected panchayati raj institutions in 1957. The grim food situation in the subsequent years triggered a search for directly production oriented programmes.

This led to the formulation in the early sixties of a number of programmes such as intensive agricultural district programme (IADP) and intensive agricultural area programme (IAAP) which were designed to accelerate agricultural production in selected regions that were naturally endowed with good soil and irrigation facilities. With more and better inputs and greater intensity of extension work, faster growth was actually achieved in these areas. The efforts to augment production were helped fortuitously by the availability of Mexican high-yield variety seeds. The cumulative result of these efforts was the phenomenon which came to be characterised as the 'green revolution'. In the seventies, the emphasis shifted to the target group approach. Productivity movement was sought to be balanced by an egalitarian concern. A number of clientele specific programmes were launched to improve the economic conditions of small and marginal farmers and the landless agricultural labour. Special programmes were conceived for the 38 million tribal population who had virtually been left out of the development process earlier. In 1974, another special programme was launched for the development of the chronically drought affected areas. If the earlier programmes were meant for the poorer 'people', the drought prone area programme was meant for the poorer 'areas'—the marginal landscape representing the arid and semi-arid areas where living has traditionally been difficult for human, cattle and plant population.

In addition, a variety of special programmes has been launched in recent years to deal with specific areas and problems such as command areas, hill areas, desert areas, rural industries, rural artisans, rural employment and so on. Besides, projects have been specially formulated to develop specific crops like sugarcane, cotton and pulses. In the field of animal husbandry also there have been a number of schemes for cattle and dairy development, sheep and wool development, etc.

Looking back, one can therefore sum up that the tendency in recent years has been to concentrate on *specific* problems and try to deal with them directly. This has produced some good results because of concentrated attention and pointed thrust in planning and implementation. But, at the same time, the specificity approach has led to a process of sub-optimisation in rural development. This has spawned multiplication of programmes, projects and agencies, each of which has tended to become a world unto itself. At the field level, activities in any sector generally have their repercussion on other allied sectors. Physically also, projects have geographical spill-over effects. Hence, vital linkages need to be established between programmes and projects and their areas of operation to get the maximum pay off from investments.

The current trend is to define 'rural development, in comprehensive terms embracing economic, infrastructural and civic development with special reference to the removal of destitution and unemployment. Elaborating this concept, the draft Sixth Plan observes:

Experience of various rural developmental programmes in the earlier plans has shown that a mere project approach or a sectoral approach is not adequate to lead to an overall development of the area and distribution of benefits to local population, particularly the weaker section of the society. The distribution of unemployment and poverty and the potential for development of agriculture and related activities vary widely from region to region and also within regions. Different areas in the country are at different levels of development and have varying degrees of potential, depending on local endowments. The efforts will now be to make the programme area specific and utilise the local endowments for growth for social justice and full employment. It will, therefore, be necessary to plan for integration of various programmes and establish appropriate linkages for optimal utilisation of local endowments consistent with the plan objectives, local needs and environmental balance.⁶

The Plan looks at integrated rural development as an instrument of intervention in the problems of the target group comprising small and

⁶ *The Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83, (Vol. III), op. cit., p. 67.*

marginal farmers, agricultural labourers and rural artisans. The approaches followed in the on-going special programmes like SFDA, DPAP and CAD which are broadly area development programmes are proposed to be utilised according to their relevance in particular areas to the objectives of employment generation and increased production.

Under integrated rural development, comprehensive block level plans are contemplated for production and employment generation, and for the development of infrastructural facilities and social services. The block plan will be tied up vertically with the district plan and the State plan. The district plan will take into account the block plan and give the necessary district level supportive infrastructure. It is at the district level that the problems of coordination between departments, institutions and organisations will be sorted out.

The new dispensation called the integrated rural development is comprehensive enough to include everything under the sun. Production, employment generation, development of infrastructure and social services, removal of destitution—all are included in it. How such a comprehensive approach can also be made target group specific, remains an unanswered question. Programme specificity and institutional plurality may not be wholly irrelevant to the Indian rural scene where numerous problems have to be attended to with special care. Integration might be having architectural neatness; it may not however meet the various needs of the rural situation.

INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS

If the policies so far have failed to improve the economic status of the rural poor, there is obviously something basically wrong with the policies. Actually, the policies have led to gradual increase in the magnitude of poverty. To quote V.K.R.V. Rao, "In actual fact, however, the magnitude of rural poverty has increased over the period. There can be no doubt therefore that growth in Indian agriculture over the period 1960-61 to 1973-74 which also marks the successful debut of the green revolution, has not been accompanied by social justice."⁷

The new slant called the integrated rural development may not be that new at all. The important question that has to be raised at this stage is: how far was rural poverty being caused by disjointed schemes and measures, and to what extent would 'integration' reduce the incidence of poverty?

While examining the agrarian structure of the underdeveloped world, Keith Griffin has observed that "the policies that governments have adopted have been not only inequitable, they have also reduced the level of output and its rate of growth. In effect, governments have been arbiters of a

⁷V.K.R.V. Rao, "Growth with Social Justice", *Kurukshetra*, May 16, 1978.

'negative sum game'. That is, the gains of those who have benefited from public policy have been less than the losses of those discriminated against". This he attributes not so much to technology as to inappropriate institutions and poor policy.⁸

On the institutional front, the whole question of 'relations of production' in agricultural continues to remain an area of darkness mainly because of lack of political will to push through land reforms. Although the new technology of agricultural production has been characterised as scale neutral, the size of landholdings has been determining the degree of access to inputs. The small and marginal farmers are thus virtually squeezed out of the institutional sources of credit, seeds, fertilizer and pesticides. So long as the rural institutions continue to be controlled by the landed elite, all the policy shifts would be of mere cosmetic significance.

The National Commission on Agriculture made pointed reference to the skewed distribution of land holdings, and observed that the new agricultural technology had largely benefited the bigger farmers and tended to add to the disparity between the more privileged and the less privileged in the rural sector.⁹ According to the Commission, the cooperatives and commercial banks lacked the understanding and ability to tackle the special needs of small farmers, let alone those of the marginal farmers and the agricultural labourers. The Commission, therefore, recommended a comprehensive organisation for planning the production of small and marginal farmers, introducing subsidiary occupations, planning investments for improvement and diversification of productive capacity and organising inputs and services as well as proceeding and marketing on a joint basis.¹⁰

Earlier in our discussion, reference was made to the creation of special organisations like SFDA, DPAP and ITDP which are intended to attend to the special problems of the economically weaker sections and the marginal areas. The National Commission on Agriculture suggested the constitution of large-sized multipurpose cooperative societies, called the farmers' service societies, to attend to the problems of the small and marginal farmers in a comprehensive manner. Some interesting recommendations for institutional reform for the rural poor have come from the Dantwala Working Group Report on Block Level Planning.¹¹ The institutional issue, strictly speaking, does not fall within the terms of reference of the Working Group. It goes to the credit of the Working Group, however, that some new ground has been broken on the question of institutional change and

⁸Keith Griffin, *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change*, Macmillan, 1974, pp. 254-5.

⁹This point was brought out earlier by the All-India Rural credit Review Committee, 1969.

¹⁰*Report of the National Commission on Agriculture*, 1976, Part XII, Supporting Services and Incentives, Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, New Delhi, pp. 17-18.

¹¹*Report of the Working Group on Block Level Planning* (Mimeo), Planning Commission, Government of India, 1978, Chapter VI.

organisation of the poor. The stand taken by the Working Group on panchayati raj and people's participation deserves special mention.

The Working Groups' reservation about panchayati raj institutions is clear from the following observation:

Our (second) reservation about the role of the panchayati raj institutions in the formulation of micro-level plans arises from a widely shared view that the weaker sections of the rural community do not feel that their interests will be fully protected under the panchayati raj institutions. A stronger version of this feeling is that the leadership of the panchayati raj institutions acts as a 'gate-keeper' and prevents the flow of benefits for the weaker sections of the rural community. This is hardly surprising in the given context of the inequitable structure of the rural economy. Unless and until adequate safeguards are provided against the likelihood of the dominance of the panchayati raj institutions by the vested interests, giving them a decisive voice in the preparation of micro-level or grassroot plans, one of its major objectives, namely, removal of poverty, exploitation and unemployment will not have much chance of being realised.¹²

On people's participation, the Working Group has been equally forthright. The suggestion is to consult the people on micro level planning after analysis of data and information has been completed and a broad plan frame drawn up. To quote the report:

It is well known that the public is not a harmonious entity; in reality it comprises groups with conflicting interests. Take as an illustration a plan of minor irrigation. If it is proposed in the interest of improving assets distribution to deploy a larger than proportionate share of the available underground water for the small and marginal farmers, will the 'non-beneficiary' group ungrudgingly acquiesce in the decision? Participation by the beneficiary group may result in non-participation—varying from non-cooperation to civil or not so civil resistance—by the (richer) non-beneficiary group. It is not difficult to surmise in whose favour the summation would be. Briefly, if we wish to plan for the weak, the plan may have to be imposed from above and cannot be a product from below *in which the below is dominated by the rich and the strong.*¹³

The thoughts of the Working Group on other institutional changes are quite refreshing. Suggestions have been made to prepare basic records of rights on land on which depends implementation of land reforms and

¹²Report of the Working Group on Block Level Planning, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

¹³Ibid., p. 37.

without which the supply of agricultural inputs cannot be assured. It is necessary, according to the Working Group, to arrest the deleterious effects of the existing institutions and establish some new institutions and organisations of and for the sections. Echoing Paulo Freire's idea, 'conscientisation' of the rural poor has been suggested as a method by which to make the poorer sections aware of their rights conferred under existing laws and regulations such as tenancy and minimum wages legislations and so on. In creating such awareness, the role of voluntary organisations has been specially acknowledged.

As a strategy, it has been suggested that institutions would have to be devised with a view to closing the private exploitation trap with a public support system. To reduce the dependence of the rural poor on the landlord, the money lender or the trader, the 'community grain gola' has been conceived as an interim measure bridging the time gap between the achievement of full employment and the present situation when most of the rural poor would be unemployed and experience severe food shortage. The grain gola can be operated on the basis of the small savings of the rural poor themselves coupled with the programme of additional employment and income during the succeeding years. If this mechanism works, it can later be developed into a centre for public distribution of essential commodities.

The importance of reviving and strengthening the non-farm economy was emphasised by the Working Group. Ingenuity in planning and implementation would be necessary to develop enterprises like animal husbandry, forestry, horticulture, fisheries and rural crafts and cottage industries. Institutional support for rural crafts and artisans would involve helping the artisans to organise themselves and developing their capabilities through educational and training institutions, cooperatives, voluntary agencies, banks and other bodies.

Another important suggestion relates to institutional credit support for block level planning. In this connection, the concept of 'lead branch', similar to 'lead bank', has been proposed, and the post of a credit planning officer has been envisaged for coordinating the activities of various credit agencies at the block level, monitoring the progress of schemes, and for maintaining liaison with the different implementing agencies.

Although not a very well-organised document, the Dantwala Report is not a run-of-the-mill type and it has enough food for fresh thinking on the whole issue of institutional reform for the rural poor.

No discussion on rural institutions would be complete without reference to the Asoka Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions which finalised its report close on the heels of the Dantwala Working Group.

The Mehta Committee's terms of reference were such that it had to accept panchayati raj as a system of rural government and then examine measures to resuscitate it. Inevitably what has happened that the Committee has bemoaned the gradual emaciation of panchayati raj and

recommended the system's revamping in the older spirit of the Balwantray Mehta Committee. Note the manner of advocacy of panchayati raj by the Committee :

The integrated rural development programme needs coordination at a decentralised level. This is not one that can be left only to official machinery. The need for locally elected organisations to supervise, coordinate and arrange for feedback is increasingly being felt by the State Governments themselves and it is here that panchayati raj as a system can provide the answer.¹⁴

This is poor justification for panchayati raj. Coordination is an administrative rather than institutional problem. The State Governments, far from being anxious to pass on power to panchayati raj, are squarely responsible for the emasculation of the system. Panchayati raj has to be defended on the grounds of rural institution-building and local democracy. It is essentially a political value commitment.

As regards the structure of panchayati raj, the Committee recommended the district as the first point of decentralisation below the State level, which is nothing but an attempt to universalise the Maharashtra pattern. The positioning of the second tier at the level of a cluster of villages called the 'mandal' is a novel suggestion. In a way, this also existed in West Bengal in the form of anchal panchayat. Acknowledging the difficulty of rejecting the old block level and the village, the suggestion has been made to retain them in the form of committees of their respective higher levels. Obviously the acceptance of the two-tier system will not be very easy for all the States. Especially, to vacate the block level that has been in existence since the 'community development' days, will mean considerable dislocation of administration.

Emergence of oligarchic tendencies in panchayati raj has been acknowledged as something inherent in the social milieu. The Committee felt that with greater awareness and organisation among the poor, their numerical strength would get translated into political power. Thus political imbalance has to be corrected politically.

The dichotomy between 'developmental' and 'regulatory' functions has been reaffirmed by the Committee as the collector would continue to exercise the regulatory, revenue and other functions assigned by the State Government. So the ancient duality in Indian field administration is kept in tact. A kind of sub-state federalism on the Maharashtra model would work, under which there would be a set of 'State functions' in the hands of the State-run field administration and another set of 'panchayati raj functions' in the hands of the panchayati raj institutions.

¹⁴*Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions*, Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Government of India, 1978, p. 31.

It is not our purpose here to review the Mehta Committee Report. From the point of view rural institution-building, the recommendations of the Committee reinforce strongly the earlier stand taken by the Balwantray Mehta Committee. The recommendations are a timely warning against the creeping centralism in the Indian polity. Enlisting of popular support for rural development is expected to be institutionalised through the revamping of panchayati raj. This might set in motion a process of debureaucratisation of development administration. Democratic decentralisation has, however, to be more than a mere philosophy. The panchayati raj institutions must be able to deliver the goods for which financial resources are as much necessary as managerial skill. Professional competence has to be steadily developed within these institutions. The kinds of administrative *ad hocism* that are going on now through the launching of special schemes and agencies of rural development can be arrested, if the panchayati raj institutions develop organisationally and managerially.

Namboodiripad's supplementary note to the Asoka Mehta Committee Report raises a couple of important issues. His defence of panchayati raj basically rests on the premise that these elective institutions can grow into self-conscious organisations and as a struggle of the toiling masses against the feudal and capitalist modes of oppression and exploitation. Decentralisation of power and resources to the panchayati raj institutions, according to him, is linked to the wider issue of reordering the Centre-State relationships in the Indian polity. Also he does not subscribe to the dichotomisation of administrative functions into regulatory and administrative parcels.¹⁵

It seems the two committees—the Dantwala Working Group and the Asoka Mehta Committee—are at loggerheads on the issue of institutions for rural development. The Working Group's approach to development is basically techno-managerial. Planning has been looked at as a technical exercise that needs to be protected from political contamination. A comfortable niche for it has been found under the shelter of the collector. Removal of poverty and unemployment has been conceived essentially as a technical and management problem, whereas the Asoka Mehta Committee wants planning to be the major function of the zila parishad. The orientation of the Mehta Committee is toward institution-building. The oligarchic tendencies, the Committee felt, had to be fought in the open political arena. According to it, sustained development effort needs the support of durable rural institutions. If the panchayati raj institutions have failed in the past, that does not mean that these have to be scrapped. Rather the faults should be detected and sought to be removed. The contradictions between the two committees stem from the differences in their basic approach to rural

¹⁵Note his comment: "I am afraid that the ghost of the earlier idea that Panchayati raj institutions should be completely divorced from all regulatory functions and made to confine themselves only to developmental functions is haunting my colleagues." *Report, op. cit.*, p. 165.

ent. Planning and implementation of rural development need, both political will and managerial skill.

Asoka Mehta Committee has reopened the question of building institutions for rural governance based on local popular will and . This is an issue which dates as far back as the Ripon Resolution e nineteenth century. Ironically, the old Resolution envisaged dismantling of the collectorate system of administration and its nt by popular institutions. After independence, rural instituting has been concerned with the architecture of a new system the State-run field administration, and not in replacement of the now it is clear that this dualism in field administration has worked riment of the representative system. The political will at higher ns hesitant to go the whole hog of democratising the entire field ation. So long as this trend persists, we would be having regular committee reports on the ailments of panchayati raj and prescrip-store it to health.

SUMMING UP

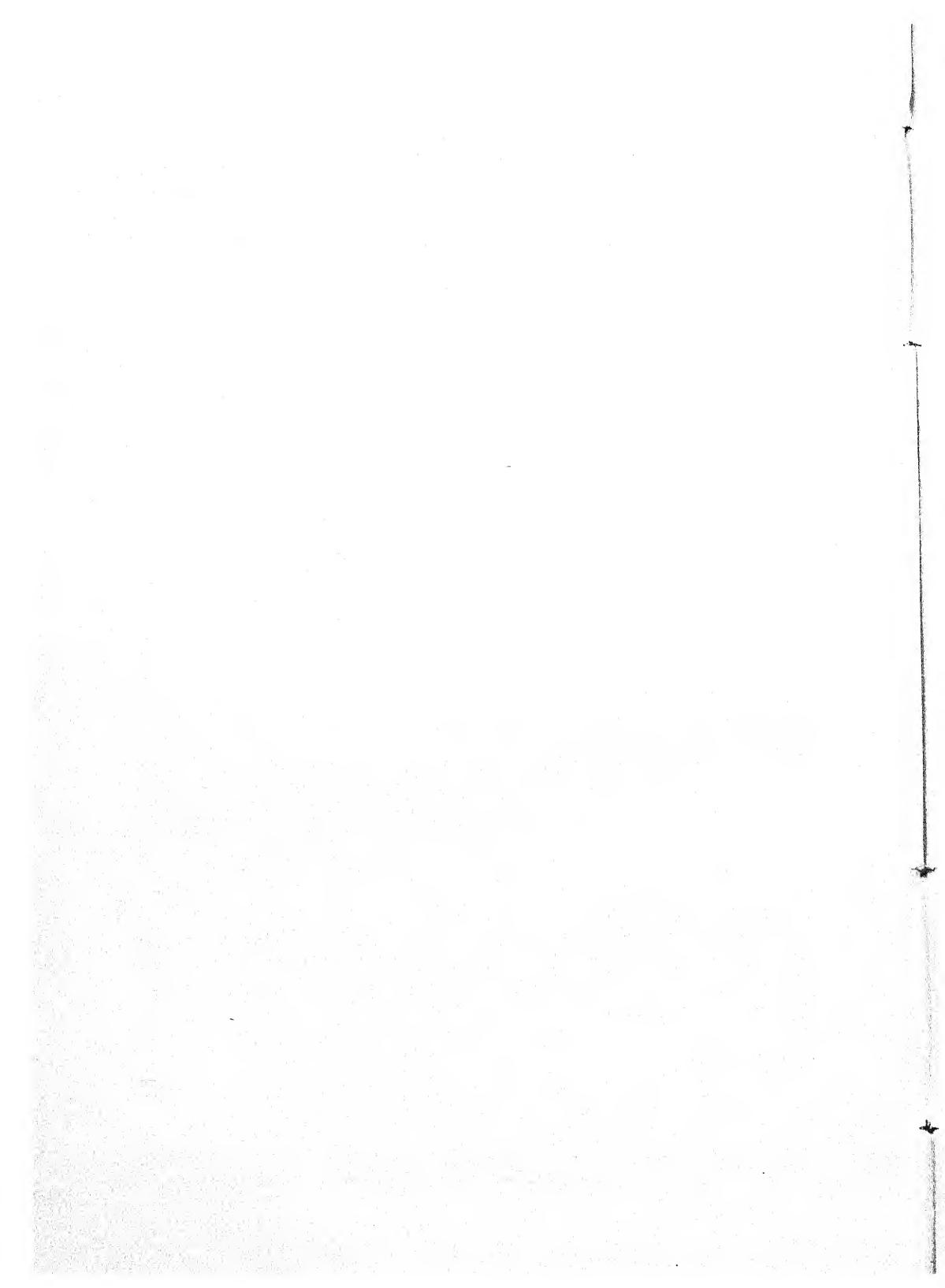
Development for the rural poor calls for a review of the institut-port system for it. The success of the endeavour needs integrators both horizontally and vertically. It is field level that has to major burden of the operation. To facilitate quicker action in planning and implementation, considerable degree of autonomy accorded to the basic field unit—the district. Because of the ted nature of development activities, differentiation of administrat-not be avoided at the field level. At the same time, the nodal of district administration has to be acknowledged, as it has to the efforts of different agencies and departments and perform lary control' function on behalf of the whole complex of field tion. It is necessary to create a sort of 'development control ie district level. Its functions would be : (a) intercept all develop- , (b) undertake planning, (c) projectise the different programmes, organisational support system for development activities, (e) ining programmes for personnel development, and (f) regularly lementation on the ground. Communication and negotiations levels such as the State headquarters and the Union Government ll be meaningful only when a control room of this type will command of the field level operations. The Dantwala Working recommended basically a planning team at the district level. t of the planning team is narrower than that of a control room. soka Mehta Committee's recommendation is aimed at lending support to executive action at the field level. Popular participation g and implementation can be formally structured with the help

of a revamped panchayati raj system. In large scale governmental set-up at higher levels, the legislative-executive relationship has generally been managed without much of boundary crossing. But, as one moves down the level, at the district and other lower territorial units, the legislative wing is expected to 'interfere' in executive matters and create boundary confusion. It takes a long time to evolve sound traditions of functional relationships between the two wings. Political maturity of local leaders through continued association with local institutions is bound to minimise frictions with the executive wing. At the other end executive action will gain in legitimacy if it is taken in close consultation with the legislative wing. Professional competence which is not always available at lower units of government, has to be developed at the field level. This is expected to reduce *ad hoc* political interference.

The dual system of field administration with the collectorate and the panchayati raj institutions is theoretically untenable and practically cumbersome. Democratic theory is in support of panchayati raj. In practice also the duality creates problems of coordination which are not easy to resolve. The prospect of unified, elective and popular units at the field level in the future would depend on the political choice at higher level between 'field administration' and 'sub-state government'.

We may conclude with a few observations on the special organisations for rural development. As already mentioned, various types of special organisations have been set up from time to time for drought-prone areas, command areas, development of small and marginal farmers and so on. To give concentrated attention to specific problems, such organisational innovations may not altogether be undesirable. But the unfortunate fact about these organisations is that the impulse for forming them has invariably come from exogenous forces such as the World Bank and the Union Government. The field administration has merely been accommodating these 'guest schemes' without any organisational planning of its own. In consequence, there is a lot of organisational overlap at the field level and orchestration of development effort becomes the first casualty. External donors should therefore be cautioned against indiscriminate organisational tampering. Even if suggestions come from them for changes in the administrative set-up, the field administration must have its own intrinsic strength to evaluate such suggestions and adopt only those than can be blended well with the existing set-up. The impulse for organisational changes and innovation should, in the main, come from inside the field administration.





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